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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

AUGUST, 1975
VOL. 37, NO. 2

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

DEATH WEARS A VELVET GLOVE

By BRETT HALLIDAY

When a leading Miami Beach publicist disappears after phoning Shayne for help, the redheaded private sleuth embarks upon one of the strangest and deadliest cases of his long and exciting career. Shot at by an unseen assassin, he finds himself trapped in a lethal game of blind man's buff with a roster of ruthless antagonists that includes a power-hungry armaments manufacturer, a pair of near-psychotic teenagers and one of the world's richest men—all with an island republic up for grabs.

2 to 47

TWO NEW NOVELETS

A WOMAN SEVEN FEET TALL
ROBERT W. ALEXANDER 48

A ROPE THROUGH HIS EAR
JAMES HOLDING 78

EXCITING NEW STORIES

TWINE
EDWARD D. HOCH 65

DEATH OF A BOOKIE
HERBERT HARRIS 73

THE OLD HOME PLACE
ROBERT CHESMORE 96

THE BUBBLE
ROBERT ALAN BLAIR 109

HANG FOR A SHEEP
EDWIN WELLEN 123

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Death Wears a Velvet Glove

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When ace publicist Dave Faylen disappears, Shayne finds himself the pivotal figure in a tropical island power grab that pits him against the richest billionaire in the world.

MICHAEL SHAYNE was quite certain he had not had a tail when he drove Lucy Hamilton home from the Steakhouse. But there was no doubt that he had one now. Eastbound traffic on the Causeway was unusually light, temporarily almost non-existent, and the headlights held their place steadily in his rear-view mirror—roughly a hundred yards in his rear.

To check the validity of his sense of being followed as he headed for Miami Beach from the city proper, he took advantage of the near-empty highway by lifting his speed from a measured fifty-five to seventy-five, then slowly decelerated to forty. Whether he drove faster or slower, the car behind him held its distance.

Satisfied that he *was* being followed, Shayne ignored his pursuer the rest of the way to the Cap Ferrat, the luxury hotel in which Dave Faylen maintained his office and living quarters.

There had been an unusual

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undernote of strain in the publicist's genial greeting via the plug-in table telephone at the restaurant.

"Mike," he said, "I need your help. I'm at home. I wish you'd get over here as soon as you can."

Genial, but only because Faylen's soft Irish-American accents bore an inherent charm calculated not only to woo nesting birds out of trees but woo them back again. Certainly, the message had been terse and to the point. Faylen had hung up before the redhead had opportunity either to agree or dissent.

Shayne was ravenous—he and

Lucy had been sailboating all afternoon in the south waters of Biscayne Bay—and he was barely halfway through the charcoal-black but blood-rare two-inch sirloin on his platter, swimming in sweet butter and its own delectable juices. To say nothing of the small hillock of diced O'Brien potatoes, the French fried onion rings, mushrooms and tomato halves grilled with grated cheese crusts, that accompanied it.

When the waiter took the phone away, he resumed his attack on the fare before him with gusto. After all, if Faylen's message was urgent in content, it had not been urgent in tone.

Little by little, however, urgency breached the bastions of his appetite. In the many years he had known Dave Faylen, Shayne had never before heard him come out with a direct request. Invariably, the most successful public relations man Miami Beach had known since the late, great Steve Hanagan, had prefaced even the most trivial request for a favor with an offer of something in return that far outweighed it.

Such, along with his great charm of voice and personality, was the secret of Dave Faylen's success. He made you *want* to fulfill whatever favor he asked of you.

"Mike, I *need* your help. I'm at home. I wish you'd get over here *as soon as you can.*"

Uttering a single fervent four-letter monosyllable, the redhead laid knife and fork down on his platter with a third of the steak still untouched. Dave Faylen, famous as one of the most lavish hosts in all Miami, had spoiled his meal.

There was, also, the fact that the publicist had called him here at the Steakhouse. Not the fact that he had been able to locate him here—after all, Faylen knew Shayne's haunts and habits and had a professional flair for locating those persons he wanted or needed.

What troubled the detective was that Faylen had not left a message with the headwaiter for Shayne to call him when he was finished. Such was the publicist's usual style.

Therefore, whatever the key of its delivery, the message had to be urgent.

He looked across the banquette table at Lucy, saw that she was well into her second thick lamb chop, said, "Sorry, Angel, but duty calls."

She sighed, pushed her own platter away, reached for the compact in her shoulder bag, said, "Trouble?"

"Maybe." The redhead beckoned the waiter to bring their check, added, "I'm going to have to find out."

So here he was, en route to Dave Faylen's penthouse at the Cap Ferrat, with an unknown party or parties riding shotgun on his tail.

Since its erection nine years before, Faylen had occupied the top floor of the south wing of the luxury hotel. On the left side of the soft-carpeted corridor, a modest bronze plate alongside a crimson door read *Faylen Enterprises*. The door on the right bore only its number in gold figures—*22-E*. This was the entrance to the publicist's private apartment.

When four rings on the office bell failed to get a response, Shayne tried 22-E. The bell chimed softly as he pushed the button but again there was no response.

Puzzling, in view of the restaurant call—also irritating. The redhead stood there, wondering what the hell, with visions of his unfinished steak sharp in his head. In mounting ill temper, he gave the gilt doorknob a twist. It turned in his hand.

Pushing it open, Shayne walked in and looked around. It was the first time he had been in Dave Faylen's home—the publicist, like many other men who live gregarious professional lives, was sedulous about maintaining his personal privacy.

For Miami Beach, the decor was an anachronism—instead of any of the usual pseudo-Spanish hacienda styles conventional in the semi-tropical resort, Faylen had furnished his living quarters in unmistakably authentic New England antiques of the chaste but opulent Federalist period, even to clipper ship prints on the walls.

The apartment was elegant, expensive, in exquisite taste. It was also obviously empty.

Shayne stood in the middle of the carpet, beginning to wonder if he had been the victim of a practical joke. But there was no doubt in his mind that it was Faylen who had called him at the restaurant—his soft accents bore an unmistakable timbre to all who knew him.

And practical jokes were simply not the publicist's style—he had far too much personal dignity to indulge in pranks of this nature.

Shayne decided to call the desk downstairs and see if the night clerk had a message for him. As he turned toward the telephone, he discovered that he was no longer alone in the apartment.

The fact the door was open, plus the softness of the carpeting, had enabled the two men to enter unheard. Both were lean, clean shaven, well tailored. One was about the redhead's height, the other an inch or two shorter. They looked like Government agents but neither produced identifying insignia nor an-

nounced that they were Feds.

Instead, the shorter man said, "Mr. Shayne, will you come with us, please?"

Very polite, very low-keyed, very professional. Despite the excellence of their tailoring, the redhead sensed both men were armed—and his own Magnum was locked in the glove compartment of his car in the parking garage in the hotel basement.

Whether they would use force was something else, but Shayne decided not to put it to the test. . .not then. Curiosity was rapidly overcoming his resentment. He shrugged, spread his hands.

"Why not?" he said. He knew better than to ask them where they were taking him.

"Thank you, Mr. Shayne."

They separated to let him walk between and a little ahead of them, closed the apartment door behind them as they left. They rode the private self-operated penthouse elevator to the basement, waited while the parking attendant drove a black Continental up the ramp.

The taller man said, "Mr. Shayne will be returning to pick up his own car later."

A nice thing to know, Shayne thought as he climbed into the rear of the Continental with the shorter of his escorts. The taller man got in front and drove skilfully back to the Causeway.

There was still no overt sign of force.

The man beside him said, "Please excuse me," as he leaned forward and pulled out a drawer from the rear of the front seat that contained a telephone. He dialed swiftly, efficiently.

"We're bringing Mr. Shayne with us," he said in conversational tones. Then, "No—no trouble. We should be there in twenty minutes."

There was no attempt to mask their route—they took the mainland highway north, skirting the city, drove swiftly to a palm-sheathed private resort area carved expensively out of the flat shoreline—a resort area of which the redhead had heard but which he had never visited.

What the hell. . . he thought. *If you're going for a ride, you might as well do it in style.*

Style—high and elegant style—was written all over the large, low-slung block-marble mansion to which they took him, pulling around to a side door instead of driving up to the front entrance. Both entrances were bathed in warm light from carefully masked lamps.

A liveried footman admitted them, bowed to Shayne, said, "This way, sir."

He was ushered into a study library with an immense desk at which a man in rumpled grey tweeds was seated. He rose as

Shayne entered, came around it smiling and offering his hand.

"Bill Winthrop, here," he said. "I'm sorry to put you to all this trouble."

The redhead was face to face with one of the half-dozen richest men in the world!

II

WHEN PERSONAL wealth passes into the tens—to say nothing of the scores and hundreds—of millions, it becomes so involved with corporate and other forms of investment that it defies assessment. In all but an abstract sense, it ceases to have meaning. There is no way, computers notwithstanding, of assessing the precise worth of a Rockefeller, a J. Paul Getty, an Onassis or a Howard Hunt at any given moment in time.

Including the oil-country Sheiks and Emirs, the term billionaire has become all but commonplace in today's inflated economy.

Yet, even among oil-rich Texans and chain-store and real-estate development tycoons, the name William Winthrop brought an automatic pause of silent respect—for here was the end-product of five generations of financiers who had financed the nation's and the world's great fortunes, from clipper ships to the nuclear era.

Where Winthrop clients had grown hog-rich, Winthrops had grown hog-richer. Shayne had often noted the silent respect lesser multi-millionaires gave the name, had come like others to take it for granted, as he took the weather for granted, or the Grand Canyon.

So here he was, face to face with what could well be the wealthiest single private individual in the world. View of a private lavatory through a partly open door in a far corner of the big study was reassuring.

Thought Shayne, *So he's human after all!*

Nor were Bill Winthrop's person and personality forbidding. Quietly handsome, of middle height, he made no effort to overpower his visitor. If his manner was assured, it was a quiet assurance, well covered by manners calculated to put the detective at his ease.

When they were seated and Shayne had accepted a Henessey and water from a well stocked portable bar, the billionaire said, "I hope you'll forgive the manner in which you were brought here. Unfortunately, a situation has arisen that made it essential that I see you at once."

The redhead made a deprecating gesture and sipped his drink in silence, waiting.

Winthrop folded his hands atop the desk, took a deep breath, then said, "Shayne—Mike—I need your help."

The redhead barely suppressed a start. It was odd that Winthrop, like Dave Faylen over the telephone, should have used this exact phrase.

Shayne said, "I'll be interested in hearing just how *I* can help *you*.

"I believe you know Dave Faylen." Winthrop's light, bright blue eyes were twin question marks.

"Very few people who live in Dade County don't know Dave," said the redhead. "Why? Is he in trouble?"

"I don't know—but he seems to have disappeared rather suddenly at a time when I very much wish to see *him*." A pause, then, "I want you to find him for me."

"What if he doesn't want to be found?" said Shayne, sensing the iron beneath the velvet glove in the billionaire's request.

Winthrop lifted both hands from the desk in a helpless gesture, said, "In that case. . ." He let it hang.

"You seem to have a very efficient staff for the sort of work you're asking me to perform," said the redhead. "They certainly found *me* fast enough."

"*Touché*!" Winthrop's smile returned. He rubbed a suddenly wrinkled forehead, shook his head, sighed. "It's frightfully involved, of course. My men are handpicked—all former F.B.I. operatives—but unfortunately they are known to certain people who may not have the best interests of either Dave or myself at heart."

Shayne said, "May I ask you one question?"

"Of course." The billionaire was affability itself.

"Mr. Winthrop—"

"*Bill,* please, Mike."

"Bill, just how long ago was it this evening that you decided you wanted to see me?"

The billionaire actually laughed. His, "Not very long," was unneeded since the laugh gave Shayne his answer. More, Shayne knew Bill Winthrop knew he had given it.

"Bill," the redhead said, "I went to Dave Faylen's apartment in response to the same request for help you just made me. Dave is a valued friend, and by going there I consider myself to have

accepted his offer of employment."

"But there was no offer," said Winthrop. "And you gave no acceptance."

"Enough for me," Shayne finished his drink and got to his feet.

The billionaire rose with him, said, "It's nice to meet a man of your integrity, Mike. But just what do you propose to do?"

"Find him," said the detective.

"But that is exactly what *I* want you to do."

It was Shayne's turn to marshal his thoughts. He said, "*I* want to find him for Dave Faylen's reasons, not for yours, Bill."

"But they coincide, Mike."

"Perhaps," said the redhead. "Perhaps not. I won't know that to my satisfaction until I find him and learn why he has disappeared. If, in fact, he *has* disappeared."

"I think you'll find he has." Winthrop sighed. "Incidentally, Dave is—or was—in my employment. So, as his employee, Mike, in a sense you're mine as well."

"Not exactly." Grey eyes and light blue ones locked for a long moment.

"I guess you're right." The billionaire admitted defeat gracefully, added, "If you need my help. . ." He scribbled a number on a sheet of notepaper, handed it to the detective.

"Thanks—Bill." Shayne stuffed it into a fold of his wallet. "May I get back to my car now?"

"Of course." Winthrop punched a buzzer on his desk. In the moment that remained to them alone, he added, "You may not believe it, but I've enjoyed this. I hope we meet again, Mike."

The two former G-Men arrived a moment later and escorted the redhead back to the black Continental. . .

The hour was still short of eleven when Shayne entered the lobby of the Cap Ferrat, a quietly resplendent pillared foyer in costly mottled grey-and-white marble that always made him think of a cross-section of a piece of nougat candy. He approached the desk and asked for the night manager, who recognized him at once.

Shayne explained that he was there in response to a call from Dave Faylen, asked if the publicist had returned.

"I was not aware Mr. Faylen was out," replied the hotel official, looking mildly surprised. "But I have no way of knowing. The penthouse has a private elevator, Mr. Shayne."

"I know. I used it earlier this evening. Would you mind ringing him up?" the redhead asked.

"Mr. Faylen left strict orders not to be disturbed." The manager hesitated, then, under the prodding of the detective's stare,

made the effort. There was no response.

Shayne went downstairs to the parking garage and reclaimed his car, checking it out carefully before leaving the premises. Special tool kit, radio telephone, gun in glove compartment—as far as he could tell, nothing had been disturbed. He punched the starter with his left foot, released the emergency brake and drove up the ramp, then turned double left toward the Causeway back to Miami.

An interesting evening—but frustrating to say the least. Shayne wondered what in hell had happened to Dave Faylen, hoped he had come to no harm. At least, he thought, he had met the world's richest man.

But how in hell was he going to find Faylen? And why was Bill Winthrop concerned? Something big—*very big*—had to be afoot. He decided a call to his newspaper friend Tim Rourke would be in order, called the Miami *News*, where Rourke's daily stint was about up.

The reporter had departed some ten minutes earlier for parts unknown. Shayne drove on, wondering if anyone he wanted to see was home. Thus far, it was Operation Dead End.

A fine unseasonable rain had begun to fall and once again the Causeway traffic was light. He was not halfway across when he discovered that again he had acquired a tail. Once again, when he put it to the test by altering his driving speed, the following headlights kept their distance.

Was it the same tail or a new one? Good question, the redhead decided. The frustration within him came to a boil and he resolved to take steps. Just beyond the west exit from the Causeway, there was a street excavation that blocked the immediate right-hand turn. The redhead was familiar with it, having been caught twice in irksome traffic tie-ups during the four days of the digging.

Now he hoped to put it to his own use.

Picking up speed, he wove in-and out of lane, passing a half dozen cars before he reached the end of the long viaduct. The moment he passed the excavation, he pulled to a halt, switched off his lights and backed up, swinging the car around to the left so that he would have a clear view of the cars coming off the Causeway.

His pursuers were driving with both headlights and fog lamps on, and he felt sure he would recognize them. If they passed by, he intended to fall in on *their* tail for a change and try to discover who they were, or at least what they were up to.

His spurt of a third of a mile should have given him time to

pick them up as they came off the Causeway. He had noted no four-lamped cars in close pursuit. Three cars had already passed by the time he got his car off the road and into position. There would be two or three more, depending on whether his follower or followers had made a real effort to keep up.

Two, three—fthen four, five, six, seven and eight—cars passed him, their tires swishing on the wet pavement. Shayne uttered a curt monosyllable as his frustration mounted again and reached new heights. Either they had passed by faster than he had expected or they had switched off their fog lamps and gone on their way undetected.

Wondering if, having gone past, they had spotted him and were coming back, the redhead peered out the left hand front window, lowering it for clearer vision through the night rain. Beyond him, the street was empty save for the receding taillights of other cars coming off the Causeway.

Taking a deep breath and releasing it through his teeth, Shayne reached for the gear lever to put himself in motion once more. As he did so, he glanced to his left in pure reflex action to gauge the oncoming traffic he would have to cut into—and froze.

It was there, still a hundred yards away, against all regulations pulled to a stop on the right edge of the crossbay viaduct. He could barely make out the reflections of the two sets of headlights against the wet varnish of other cars as they passed it.

Even as he looked, wondering what the hell, a powerful searchlight beam, white-bright and ribbon-narrow, came alive from the side of the pursuing car's windshield. It pinpointed Shane without an instant of groping, temporarily turning the darkness of the car into high-noon brightness.

The redhead was so startled that he froze. The car, already in *Drive*, leapt ahead, then lurched to a stall.

The clumsiness of his reflexes saved his life—for even as the car started and stopped, a high-velocity projectile whined and spatted through both rear windows at the exact level of his head.

He got the car going—mercifully it was not flooded—and got out of there in a hurry.

III

MIKE SHAYNE drove by an indirect route to the Beef House on Miami Miami Avenue. Steakhouse to Beef House, he thought, all within a couple of hours—but what a couple of hours! He was angry to the bone.

Quite certain that he had not

been followed—his route had been calculated to check out that fact—he pulled into the parking lot and put his car in the most inconspicuous corner he could find. Then he got out the radio telephone and punched the number Bill Winthrop had given him.

The billionaire himself answered.

"Shayne here," said the redhead. "Will you call off your dogs and tell them to stop taking potshots at me?"

There was a four-second silence. Then, "I would if I could, Mike. Are you okay?"

"Call them *off*!" said Shayne. "Unless you want it all over the front pages."

"I can't," said Winthrop.

"Why not?"

"Because whoever it is, it's not my men. Believe me, I want you to find Dave Faylen."

"You had his phone tapped—you as good as admitted it. Or was that somebody else, too?"

"On the tap, I plead guilty. But believe me, I have not had you followed since you left my house."

His sincerity and concern were convincing. But Shayne was still red hot.

He said, "Then who in hell was it? Somebody was using damned sophisticated weaponry. It's plain bull luck I'm not dead."

Another pause, then, "I was afraid of that."

"Afraid—why?" Shayne said.

"I can't tell you now, Mike. Where are you?"

"None of your damned business, Bill."

"But it wasn't my men, I tell you." Winthrop sounded aggrieved. "I give you my word."

For five generations, the value of the Winthrop word on anything had been like Caesar's wife—above suspicion. Written contracts might have been turned inside out, under-the-table deals a part of the game in amassing the Winthrop fortune. But, unless tradition lied, a Winthrop verbal promise was solid gold.

Winthrop said, "Mike, perhaps I'd *better* have you followed—for your own protection. That's why I asked where you were."

"No thanks, Bill," said the redhead. "I've managed to survive thus far on my own and I'd rather keep it that way. Okay?"

"If you say so, Mike. But, be careful. Finding Dave is a lot more important than you can have any idea of."

"I'll be careful," said Mike. "If I find him—and *if* he agrees—I'll let you know."

That was that. The detective made no further effort to pump Winthrop as to the identity of his would-be assassins. If Winthrop had not volunteered the information when the redhead first asked him, he was not going to do it

now. As he put the phone back on its hook and locked the car, Shayne wondered what Winthrop's reasons were.

They had to be compelling ones at the very least—the problem was a big *WHAT*.

Tim Rourke, lean, lanky and dishevelled as a scarecrow after a hurricane, greeted him from his regular rear booth in the back of the restaurant. The wreckage of a huge platter of what had been fried eggs, fried ham and fried potatoes was still in front of him. He lifted a half-empty triple bourbon in greeting.

"Ah, the world's greatest detective."

"And the world's worst reporter."

Shayne sat down and ordered a brandy on the rocks from Rosie, the smiling waitress, then rested his elbows on the booth table and studied the reporter.

"I'm clean," said Rourke. "Honest, officer, I didn't do it. I have an alibi, I wasn't there, I was framed."

"Relax." Shayne accepted his drink, downed half of it in a gulp. He said, "I was just wondering if you were sober enough."

"Enough for what?"

"Listen good, Tim," said Shayne. "What would you say if I told you somebody just tried to kill me?"

"Probably, 'So what else is new?' " The words were light but Rourke's eyes came into sharp focus.

"What would you say if I told you I came from a session with Bill Winthrop?"

The reporter put down his glass with a thump.

"I'd say *you're* the one who needs sobering up, Mike. Bill Winthrop—I take it you mean *the* Bill Winthrop—is in Sao Paulo at the ABC economic conference. He addressed them this afternoon."

"You're *sure*?"

"It was on the eleven o'clock news." The reporter nodded toward the big color screen over the doorway that led from the restaurant portion of the Beef House to the bar in front.

"Well, he's at his Green Gables estate tonight."

Rourke rubbed his chin, which needed shaving, said, "Come to think of it, it wasn't a Tel-star broadcast. If they could fly the film up, they could fly Bill Winthrop. He could commandeer a military aircraft if he wanted, I suppose."

"And there's a big time-zone differential," said the redhead. "Bigger than most of us realize. Six or seven hours. But what in hell brought him here?"

"What did he tell you?"

"He wants to see Dave Faylen," said Mike. "And Dave wants to see me."

"Cozy," said Rourke, taking

another pull at his highball. "So what's the problem?"

"Apparently, somebody doesn't want either of us to see Dave. He's dropped out of sight. And I wasn't kidding about somebody taking a potshot at me in the car."

"At night? You've *got* to be kidding!"

Shayne shook his head. "It's got to be big," he said.

"You can say *that* again—but what?"

"I thought maybe you'd have a lead, Tim."

"If there were anything *that* big going on in or around Miami, it's ten to one I would," the reporter told him. "No fooling, Mike, there's nothing stirring hot enough to get Bill Winthrop out of Brazil that fast." He paused, frowned, then added, "Unless. . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless it's those two kooky kids of his. You remember, the children he had by his second wife, the girl who got killed in the Riviera car crash."

"What about them?" Shayne asked.

"Well, you know Bill Winthrop hasn't married again—and it was almost a dozen years ago. A long time for a guy like him, attractive and with all that loot. The story is, he dedicated his life to raising them when their mother died."

"To raising them and more millions," said Shayne, smiling.

"You hit it," Rourke told him. "He may not have married again, but he simply didn't have time to do the two-parent job alone. Too many other demands. But he kept the kids under strict discipline—governesses, private tutors, two bit weekly allowances, private boarding schools, the whole schmeer."

"*Oh*-oh!" Shayne nodded. "And now the nestlings are out of the nest and running wild."

"Well, yes and no. It's hard to tell what they're like, of course, but they're beautiful kids—a boy and a girl, the girl's two years older—and they came into their own money from their mother's estate last year."

"So what's the pitch? Are they in trouble?"

"Not yet—as far as I know. But you might ask your buddy Will Gentry. He'll know if there's smoke anyway."

Shayne thought that over. He'd ask Gentry, of course. The Miami Chief of Police was an old and valued friend and occasional mentor. But somehow he couldn't fit the pattern of highly professional skilled attempted assassination and possible kidnaping of Dave Faylen to the impulsive recklessness of a couple of overdisciplined rich kids suddenly given their heads.

There had to be something or someone else involved—someone

or something else very big indeed. He felt as if he were nibbling at the edge of a giant pizza in a nightmare, a pizza that kept moving away as he seemed about to get his teeth really into it.

Rourke suddenly beckoned to Rosie and pantomimed using a phone. She nodded and brought one to the booth, plugged it in. The reporter dialed with bony fingers, then said, "Barney, this is Tim. Get me the morgue, will you?"

"What have you got?" Shayne asked, curious.

Rourke motioned him to silence, waited, said, "Sorry to wreak havoc with your beauty sleep, Stella." He winced at what came in through the earphone, then said, "Honeychile, will you see what we have on Dave Faylen? Yeah, the public relations boy." Another pause, then, "No, I want stuff on Faylen himself, not his campaigns. . .who he worked for before he came here—my hunch is New York—all that jazz. Sure, I'll hold."

He waited the better part of ten minutes, then listened and made a grimace. "That's all you've got?" he asked. "Come on, gal, there must be *something*."

Moments later, he hung up, obviously disgusted, said, "Your buddy is one P.R. man who believes in keeping himself out of the news and his clients in."

"Maybe that's why he's a success," Shayne finished his drink, said, "Nice try, Tim," and left, more at a loose end than before apart from Tim's information about the Winthrop kids. How they could be involved in the situation—whatever it was—eluded him completely.

He decided he might as well go home. There seemed nothing else

he could do this night. In view of his attempted murder, he approached the old apartment hotel on Second Street with care, parking the Buick outside rather than in the basement garage. Before getting out, he removed the revolver from the glove compartment and tucked it into his waistband.

IV

NOTHING STIRRED on the street as Mike Shayne walked to the door of the building and let himself in with a resident's key. The lobby was empty save for Jules, the night man, who sat in his cubbyhole close to the elevator, looking more than half asleep.

"Message for you, Mr. Shayne." Jules yawned as he reached for it. "The gentleman who left if was here quite a while. He finally decided he'd rather wait for you outside in his car."

"Thanks—what did he look like?" Shayne weighed the stiff Manila envelope as he spoke.

"Not as tall as you, Mr. Shayne, but bulkier. Grey hair and kind of red faced—but nice looking. He didn't leave his name."

"He didn't have to." Shayne spoke cryptically as he ripped open the envelope. Jules had described Dave Faylen to a T.

"How long was he here?" the detective asked.

"Oh, about two hours." Jules squinted at the wall clock on his right, added, "He only left about twenty minutes ago. Said he'd be outside in his car."

The publicist's Cadillac convertible was parked under a palm tree across the street, giving him a good view of both the front door and the garage entrance. It was unlocked—and empty—the keys still dangling from the ignition switch on the dashboard. Reaching in to withdraw them, the detective put his right hand against the back of the seat for balance—and it slipped on something sticky and wet.

When he pulled free, even in the dim light of the street, there was no mistaking its substance. His hand was covered with blood.

Shayne drew his revolver as he went into a half-crouch and spun around the hood of the car, using it for cover. But no other movement disturbed the deceptive somnolence of the quiet city street.

No other movement, no other sound. . .

He did not return the handgun to his waistband until he had opened the hotel front door again and gained the relative safety of the lobby. Jules was watching him, round-eyed, wide awake.

"Anything wrong, Mr. Shayne?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. Jules, did you hear a shot recently?"

The night man wrinkled his receding brow, then said, "It's hard to say, sir, with car backfires and all. And you usually hear some shots during the night."

"Anything close by—you'd have heard it. Since the gentleman left."

The night man's face cleared. "There was one, maybe a minute or two after. It wasn't especially loud—you know, not like a shot close by. More like an electric shaver turned on and off. But very quickly."

"Thanks."

That had to be it. Jules had accurately described the sound of a gun with a silencer heard at close hand. It figured, fitted in with the extraordinarily accurate shot that had come so close to ending the redhead's career abruptly not long before.

Someone had shot Dave Faylen—of that Shayne was certain. But where had they taken him—and why? He ripped open the Manila envelope, hoping for a lead, standing well away from both the door and the lobby windows.

It was a real estate folder—by its sleek glazed paper and sharp color printing an expensive one, its pictures pushing an exclusive tropical resort. There was a brief note scrawled in broad blue ballpoint across a corner of the brochure.

It read—

Mike,

Decided to wait for you here but am begin-to feel like a shooting gallery duck. I'll be in my car parked outside whenever you come in. Must see you. Time is getting short.

Dave.

Shayne felt sick to his stomach. Then his anger returned, this time a cold fury rather than frustration-based. He sat down and studied the brochure briefly but comprehensively. If the publicist had merely lacked paper on which to scribble his note, he would have asked Jules for hotel stationary.

Therefore, the resort brochure had to mean something. The problem was—*what?*

Specifically, it was offering opportunity for investment pledges in a place called Mission Bay to a select clientele in a country the redhead had never heard of—the Republic of Oraba. The beautiful colored photographs revealed idyllic tropical land and seascapes offering the most luxurious facilities and recreational opportunities.

The next was loaded with inducements, including free visits to Oraba's Mission Bay Inn, transportation both ways prepaid, all facilities offered free of charge including gourmet food,

liquor and even a gambling credit at the Mission Bay Casino. Selectivity of the offer was heavily stressed and "investment opportunities" were offered at a modest minimum of a quarter of a million dollars.

Selective? Under those terms, Shayne thought, it had to be *positively* exclusive. Republic of Oraba—vast opportunity for those who could afford it. In short, those who didn't need it.

Shayne put the folder back in its envelope, put in in his breast pocket. He was going to have to call the police, even if it meant getting Chief Gentry out of a grumpy bed. His first impulse was to use his car phone, but discretion dictated otherwise.

He had no desire to suffer whatever Dave Faylen was suffering—if, indeed, poor Faylen could any longer feel pain or anything else. He moved to the phone at the end of the counter and Jules obediently took his place at the switchboard.

"Give me an outside line, Jules," he told the night man. "You can check t. and c. later if there are any."

"If you say so, Mr. Shayne." Jules punched a button and the redhead heard the buzz of the dial tone. But his forefinger did not dial the familiar Police Headquarters number. Instead, he dialed the confidential number Bill Winthrop had given him.

The phone *brrrr-ed* once. Shayne heard an electronic click and then a low hum before a female voice, obviously taped, parroted, "The number you dialed is no longer in service." Another click and the line was dead.

"Son of a bitch!" the redhead muttered, frowning as he dropped the instrument back in its cradle. He stood there, frowning, irresolute, for once unable to make up his mind what to do. His immediate impulse was to call the police, let them take over the search for Dave Faylen, if the publicist were still alive.

But that *if*, however slim, suggested that calling the police at this stage might seal Faylen's doom. Supposing he had been kidnapped, an official hue and cry could cause his kidnapers to decide their captive was less dangerous to them dead. Shayne did not want that.

Especially since it was unlikely he was being held for ransom—which brought Shayne back to the second question mark—why kidnap Faylen at all? He was hardly that rich a man—*or* that powerful.

The only possible valid answer Shayne could come up with was that he was being held—if he had not been already ruthlessly eliminated—because he possessed information some party did not wish him to reveal.

Chief Gentry and his boys were going to have to wait.

Meanwhile, there was the matter of Faylen's car. It would hardly be wise to leave it in the street, where it was bound to be spotted sooner or later. Thankful at the moment for two things—that the hotel was not full-up, thus guaranteeing plenty of parking places in the garage, and that Faylen's abductors or murderers had left the keys in his Cadillac, Shayne put both vehicles away, leaving the publicist's bloodstained convertible in the most remote space available.

He took the elevator direct from the garage to his apartment and, after pouring himself a tall Hennessey highball, settled down at his desk to ponder the next move. . .if any.

To date, he had been effectively stymied before he could even get started. Whoever had been willing to kill him to prevent his meeting the publicist had thus far coppered all bets—and had managed to get away with Dave Faylen alive or dead.

The detective very much doubted that the attempts on his own life would be repeated now that the Faylen-napers had their quarry. What puzzled him most was the urgency that had driven whoever it was to such ruthlessness.

From where he now sat, Shayne was forced to presuppose that it was the publicist's cryptic call to the restaurant that had triggered their use of violence—and that brought up another point.

Bill Winthrop had actually admitted, under the redhead's questioning, that he had tapped Faylen's phone at the Cap Ferrat. Nor had the billionaire shown reluctance in making the admission. Yet Winthrop's urgency had been sufficient to make him desert the vitally important Sao Paulo economic conference immediately after making his address.

Was this urgency sufficient also to drive Winthrop to attempted murder and kidnaping—and why? Reaching for the telephone, Shayne dialed the billionaire's private line again—and received the same taped "out of service" response.

Uttering a sharp four-letter word, he slammed the phone back in its cradle.

Spreading the folder Dave Faylen had left him, Shayne went over it in detail, seeking any possible lead beyond the hastily scribbled note Faylen had scribbled in the corner.

. . .am beginning to feel like a shooting gallery duck . . .Must see you. Time is getting short.

Evidently, the publicist had

decided his chances against the purusers he evidently knew to be following him were better in the darkness and mobile cover of his car than in the lighted apartment-hotel lobby. *Poor bastard,* Shayne thought. Faylen had been wrong. But it occurred then to the redhead that it probably wouldn't have mattered where he waited.

Time is getting short—time for what? Shayne tugged at his left earlobe. The time Faylen could expect to remain free, perhaps even alive? Or the time remaining before something else happened?

What about the Republic of Oraba, whose lush brochure lay spread out before him? From the map on its reverse side, this new nation, if indeed it existed, lay less than two hundred air miles east of Miami, a sizable member of the Bahaman group.

Had Faylen chosen it at random for his message, or had it been deliberate, an effort to tell the redhead something? It had to be the latter.

Shayne settled down to read the text of the brochure in an effort to find out. He was still at it an hour later when a call from Jules downstairs informed him that two gentlemen had left a package for him. Since Jules could not leave his post, would Mr. Shayne mind coming down and picking it up?

V

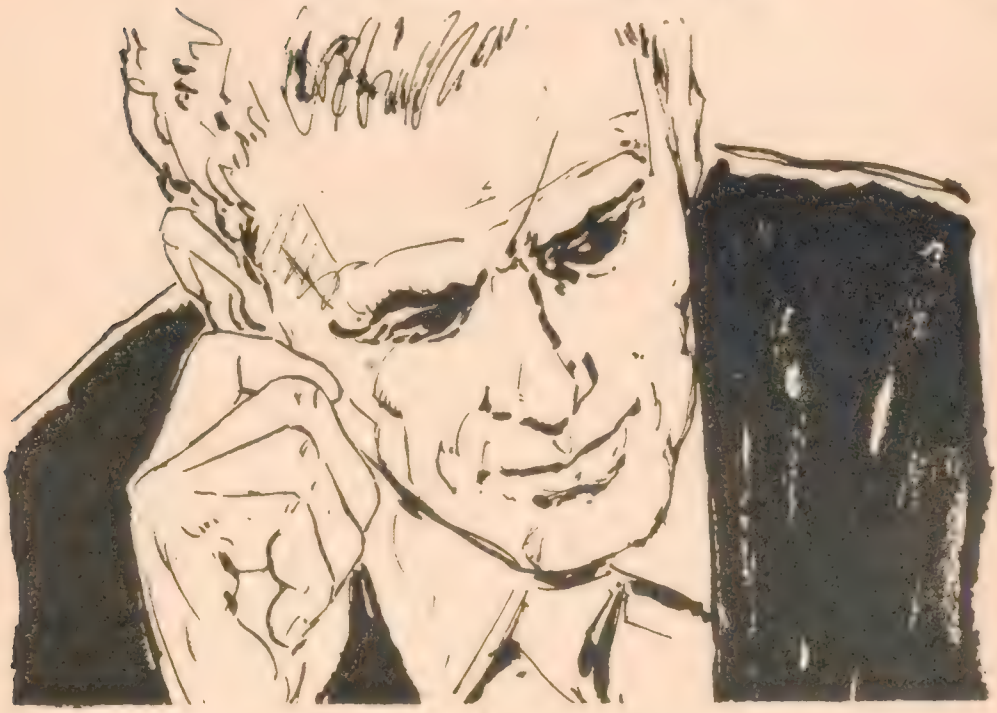
THE FLIGHT to Oraba was brief and satin smooth. The roomy amphibian had taken off in bright morning sunlight from a private airport halfway between Miami and Fort Lauderdale and was circling for its landing in Jonesport harbor just as Mike Shayne's wristwatch indicated six minutes before noon.

The island itself, as it grew larger through the porthole at his right elbow reminded the detective of an elongated human kidney cut out of emerald and set in white gold—brilliant tropical greenery fringed with smooth sandy beach.

From the literature he had been boning up on most of the night, Shayne knew that it was larger than it looked—some 900 square miles of free-form land, lying due north of Nassau, due west of the Grand Bahama itself.

Jonesport was also as indicated—a small eighteenth century provincial English seaport that had anachronistically survived into the late twentieth century—only more so. Its blue slate roofs were in immaculate repair, its white window trim spotless, the brasswork of its bright red doors agleam with high polish, its cobbled streets innocent of horse dung.

The fourteen members of their party—eight of them males, six



females—were guided courteously to waiting sedans, from the radiator caps of each of which fluttered the red and blue standard of the island republic, brave in the breeze.

So Oraba existed after all, Shayne thought. He had never been more cushily handled in his life. They had met in the lobby of the *Cap Ferrat* at nine that morning, been driven in chauffeured Cadillacs to the airport, thence transferred to the amphibian. Champagne had been served by incredibly trim and pretty black stewardesses during the flight—not the usual airline commercial hogwash but authentic Bollinger *brut* of a very fine vintage indeed.

Ashore, they were driven over the cobblestones to a reproduction of an eighteenth century tavern atop a low bluff overlooking the harbor. There, after a superb rum punch and melted cheese appetizers, they were ushered out onto a flagged stone terrace where snow-white napery covered tables alongside a stone railing with a panoramic view and a lavish buffet luncheon awaiting their pleasure.

Following green turtle soup laced with sherry and ladled from an immense silver tureen, Shayne gorged himself on a

mammoth portion of the crisp outer crust of a baron of beef, whose center was as blood rare as its hide was well done. With it, he received rissolé potatoes and the thickest, tenderest, tastiest spears of asparagus he had ever tasted.

If he had had the slightest idea why he was where he was, he would have been as content as he could remember ever being in his life. Certainly, it was the most expert and luxurious real estate promotion junket he had ever been on—or ever heard of.

The package left for him at the desk early that morning had contained a ticket under the name of Orville Carr, more literature and a brief typewritten note that read:

Mike–I hope you'll follow through on this. If D.F. has been taken, it has to be to Oraba. Be careful.

It was signed with the initials *B.W.*—for Bill Winthrop, he presumed. Whether it was authentic or not, he had no way of knowing. But he decided to presume that it was.

The package contained more material on Oraba, including a Xerox copy of an extensive report on the island republic, whose status, it appeared, was still anomolous. Oraba, as far as Shayne could tell, had to be the most extensive as well as expensive made-to-order nation ever conceived by a group of capitalistic promoters worried lest the current unsettled economic conditions of the so-called free world should deprive them and others like them of their cherished millions.

It was to be a tax-free island Switzerland, supported by the financial fat of its citizens. Oraba had been carefully selected as its site. The island, if the report were true, contained only a few thousand natives eking out an impoverished existence as a somewhat neglected element of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

This native population was to be given good fertile acreage for each family, presumably to support the influx of new wealthy citizens with grain, livestock and liquor—to say nothing of servants. In any event, the natives were to be incorporated in the new Switzerland as operating members whose status would be so upgraded that they would presumably be quite happy to keep their place in a stratified social order run by executive committee.

The land, rich and fertile as well as ideal for plush resort development, was available because Great Britain had set the whole island aside as a royal preserve for raising cattle some one

hundred and fifty years earlier—then had done little or nothing about it as the cattle interests of Australasia and Argentina objected to the threat of possible competition.

Blue-sky promotion? Shayne considered it such until he read the list of patrons already signed up. It ran to over a hundred of the wealthiest names in America. He noted with interest that Bill Winthrop was there in his alphabetical place near the bottom—and with greater interest the fact that the chief executive—no other title was used—was Brigadier General Charlton Devereux.

Devereux was an authentic hero of World War Two—a much-decorated survivor of commando-type fighting in theaters of war that ranged from Western Europe to Southeast Asia. Where the fighting was dangerous, there was Devereux, a living legend before he was thirty. Then, like other living legends, he had vanished from sight.

But only for a few years. With the coming of the troubled Sixties, the name Charlton Devereux had begun to be heard of again. Not, this time, as an active warrior, but as a friend and consultant of dictators and conservative counterrevolutionary groups, a behind the-scenes manipulator of small nations—above all as founder and president of the Charbell Corporation, manufacturer of some of the most sophisticated armaments systems developed under the eaves of private enterprise.

In short, a latter-day soldier of fortune—but one who was quite competent to finance his adventures with his own money, equip them with his own weapons, if necessary. It was sight of his name as at least nominal head of the enterprise that decided the detective in favor of using the Orville Carr reservation.

So here he was—but he was damned if he knew why anyone wanted him here on Oraba.

With the rest of his guided-tour group, Shayne was enjoying a post-prandial coffee and cognac when the fireworks began.

A deep, resonant masculine voice cut into the soft music that had been providing an undertone of easy melody for the luncheon group through invisible loudspeakers.

"Ladies and gentlemen," it announced, "if some of you have been concerned about the ability of this island republic to defend itself in case of need, the demonstration you are about to witness should put your concern to rest. Within two minutes, a pair of missiles will be approaching Jonesport at supersonic speeds—simulated Salt weapons, real in every particular save that

their warheads are dummies.

"Keep your eyes on the west!"

What followed seemed to Shayne to unfold in slow motion, although a glance at his wristwatch when it was over informed him a mere forty seconds had elapsed.

There was no further warning until the sleek surface of the brilliant blue water on either side of the small harbor entrance showed small circles of turbulence, parting briefly to permit the sudden emergence of a pair of rockets from invisible submarine emplacements that took to the air like a pair of torpedoes, trailing blazing jets of blue and yellow flame.

They rose slowly at first, then gathered amazing speed, their passage upward and outward soon visible only by the thinning pillars of smoke they left behind them as they vanished from view in the great arc of the sky above. Then, for seemingly endless seconds, the heavens looked as clear and innocent of man-made death devices as before.

Shayne found himself holding his breath, not to release it until first one, then another distant sunburst exploded far out over the placid sea. Presumably, the sham invasion missiles were scratched.

". . .rest assured that the Republic of Oraba is prepared to meet any other form of armed aggression equally efficiently. We want our citizens, old and new alike, to sleep peacefully in their beds.

"You will now be taken to Mission Bay, where you may do as you please until the cocktail hour at six. You will spend the night in the Mission Bay Inn and are free to enjoy its unique facilities.

"Thank you. This is Charlton Devereux speaking. I hope to greet you in person later in the day. Enjoy your visit with us in comfort and safety."

Impressive, the redhead thought, even if the accent on safety and armed defense seemed slightly overstressed. But from the comments of his fellow guests as they were herded politely off the terrace, it was received with whole-hearted approval.

Shayne had often wondered what the really rich found to worry about. Now he knew. They worried about losing their money and about not staying alive and healthy to enjoy the spending of it.

He was passing through the lobby en route to the waiting limousines when a smartly uniformed black attendant intercepted him and said, "Mr. Carr? General Devereux would like to see you, sir?"

VI

THE COVER Bill Winthrop had so

hastily established for him was apparently already blown—unless the man he was supposed to be was a source of special interest to the general in his own right.

Either way, Mike Shayne welcomed the prospect of information and action. He had been flying blind long enough.

The brigadier received him, not in an office but in a small billiard room off the main foyer, where he replaced his cue in a wall rack when the redhead was admitted. He was a smaller man than Shayne had expected, no more than five-ten in his socks.

Brilliant blue eyes gave youthful denial to the seamed suntanned leather of a not unhandsome face adorned with a thick Guardsman's mustache beneath a broken nose. The way he moved, quick, wary, graceful, reminded the redhead of a large jungle cat.

His voice was softer than it had sounded over the amplifiers as he said, "Mr. Carr, is it—or Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne shrugged, said, "Whichever you prefer."

"Shayne, then." Devereux thrust both hands into the ample side pockets of the khaki bush jacket he wore. "We have not met before, although I have heard of you, of course."

"And I of you, General." All very easy, on a surface-comfortable man-to-man basis. What next?

"I believe you are looking for Dave Faylen. If so, I will take you to him. You are free to rejoin your visitors' group whenever you wish."

"How is Dave?" the detective asked.

"Resting reasonably comfortably, I believe. But come with me and you can see for yourself."

They took off alone together in a Land Rover with the stock of some sort of automatic weapon protruding from a boot holster on the driver's side. Noting Shayne's look at it, Devereux smiled faintly as they took off from the tavern and said, "The island is still quite wild in places. Deer, wild ponies, even puma."

A pause, then, "Speaking of weapons, how did you like our little defense demonstration, Shayne?"

"Impressive." The redhead sensed that here was a man that demanded he guard his syllables closely. "But it looked rather expensive, even for an amply backed project like this one."

"Not really." The brigadier smiled like a man enjoying a jest. "You don't believe for a moment those were real missiles we destroyed."

"I—wondered, of course."

"We simply launched a pair of obsolete surplus rockets from the scrap heap of my own corporation

and detonated them over the ocean." Again a pause while the Land Rover negotiated a series of sharp highway turns.

Then, "Not that we don't have the genuine article."

Shayne frowned, said, "Are you expecting war? From whom? Surely not the Bahama Commonwealth—or England."

Devereux's laugh was a sharp bark. "*Hardly!*" he replied. "The Bahama boys are too disorganized and too weak—and the mother country has other worries. But we have to put on a show. You have no idea how deepseated panic runs in the minds of many of our potential investors. They dream of tumbrils in the night—so it is up to us to offer them soothing syrup."

Shayne nodded, recalling his own impressions of the state of mind of his fellow tourists. Then he said, "If you are responsible for my being here, General, I should like to thank you."

"As a matter of fact, I'm not." Devereux sounded like a man speaking the truth.

Ahead, moving in the same direction, a small and delapidated pickup truck came into view. As they came up on it from behind, Shayne noticed that its open rear was packed with hoses, rakes and other gardening equipment. At this point, the well paved road was narrow and curved, offering little room to pass.

Devereux was equal to this situation, taking advantage of a firm shoulder to slide swiftly by the small truck on the right and, bringing the Land Rover smartly back on the macadam, to proceed with speed virtually unbroken. As they went past, Shayne noted that his free hand hovered close to the stock of the automatic weapon in its holster.

"Wild ponies?" the redhead asked. "Or puma?"

"Take your pick, Shayne." The brigadier was unflappable. "We'll be at Idle Rest in six minutes."

They drew up in front of a low, rambling fieldstone structure that seemed to nestle close to the rolling ground. It looked little like a hospital or sanitarium from without. But inside, Shayne saw that it served as both.

"Many of our new citizens are of an age where they may need medical care at any moment," said Devereux. "And there are the inevitable accidents."

The Oraba operation, Shayne decided, was certainly a well organized and maintained project, whatever its real nature. Again he wondered why he was here—if Devereux had not planted his ticket, then it should logically be Bill Winthrop. But the purpose of his mission, apart from talking to Dave Faylen, remained as obscure as ever.

The publicist lay on a

cranked-up hospital bed in a cool and comfortable corner room with a color TV set into the wall where he could watch it comfortably. His left shoulder and upper arm were heavily bandaged. He greeted Shayne with a wan smile as Devereux ushered him in and left them alone together.

"Sorry to lead you such a chase, Mike," Faylen said, offering his right hand.

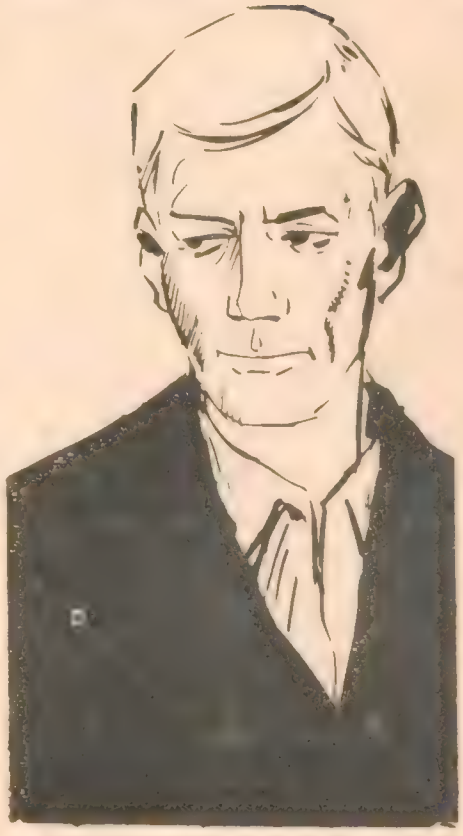
"Sorry to have kept you waiting outside my place," said the detective. Then, after a few more pleasantries, Shayne sat down beside the bed and said, "For Pete's sake, Dave, would you mind telling me what in hell this is all about?"

Dave Faylen sighed. His usual ruddy complexion had gone almost grey, presumably, Shayne imagined, from loss of blood entailed by his wound. He adjusted his upper body, wincing slightly as if the move gave him pain.

"Mike," he said, "in spite of a lifetime of experience in public relations work, I managed to fall into the nightmare trap that plagues all of us who deal in special services—attorneys, accountants, management consultants, all of us.

"The one situation above all others in which we do not wish to find ourselves is that of serving two conflicting clients at the same time."

"How did an old China hand like you manage that?" the detective asked.



"I didn't *manage* it—it simply happened. When Brigadeer Devereux brought the Oraba project to me there seemed no reason to refuse it. My Miami Beach accounts were virtually running themselves and Oraba presented some exceedingly interesting problems to a man in my profession—not the least of them being keeping it under wraps as far as the press and public are concerned until the proper moment."

"So that's why Tim Rourke never heard of it—or anyone else I know!"

"It's part of a publicist's job." Faylen permitted himself a faint smile and stir of pride, which brought on another twinge of pain. "That will teach me not to get swell-headed about it!" he murmured. "If anything will."

"Dave," said Shayne, "are you sure you want to talk about it now?" He let his eyes roam the pastel painted hospital room as if seeking listening devices.

Faylen smiled crookedly and lifted his uninjured arm in a so-what gesture. "Why not?" he said. "It's hardly a secret anymore."

"Two questions," said Shayne.

"Shoot."

"Am I wrong in thinking your conflicting client is Bill Winthrop?"

"No." Faylen sighed again and shook his head.

"Then why is his name on the list of Oraba patrons?" the redhead asked.

"Oh, Bill's a charter member. But that's just the springboard. You see, I've handled Bill Winthrop's personal P.R. account since he was a teenager. I used to have to keep *his* name out of the public prints when he was sowing his wild oats."

Shayne tugged at his left earlobe, his grey eyes alight, said, "And now Winthrop has hired you to keep *his* kids free of unwelcome publicity."

"Who put you onto that?" Faylen asked sharply.

"Tim Rourke—last night," said Shayne. "He couldn't come up with any other reason strong enough to bring Winthrop barreling back from the Sao Paulo conference."

"Remind me to award Tim a couple of golden figs," said the publicist. "Mind you, I love those kids. Young Bill is so sincere it hurts—while Betsy is. . .well, beautiful is the only word I can think of. But they're kids and feeling *their* oats.

"Big Bill left them in my charge while he was flying around South America setting up this conference, and I thought it would be smart to get them out of Miami. Oraba seemed ideal and Charley Devereux agreed. The kids weren't wild about it, but they went along."

"Sounds okay, Dave," said Shayne. "What went wrong?"

"Well, Bill Winthrop and Charley had a falling out—a major split over how Oraba is to be developed—all of this offstage as far as I was concerned. Bill made that flight from Sao Paulo yesterday to tell me to get the kids out. He seemed to think Charley and I had arranged to have them kidnapped and held here. I yelled for you to help me out of it, and the next thing I

knew I got a bullet through my upper arm."

He paused, added, "No bones broken, thank God!"

"Thank God for that!" echoed Shayne. "But why were you brought here?"

"Oh, Dev wants me under lock and key."

"And why does he want *me* here?" Shayne asked.

"Probably, like me, to give him more leverage on Bill Winthrop," said Faylen.

"Not true," said the brigadier, appearing in the doorway. "Certainly not as Orville Carr."

"Who the hell *is* Orville Carr?" the detective asked.

"*Was*," said Devereux. "A Seattle lumber king who died last week."

"Then who sent me his ticket?" Shayne asked.

The other two looked at each other and said nothing. Finally, Faylen added, "I don't believe I'm justified in answering that question, Mike."

A nurse appeared them, carrying a small plastic tray with a pair of little cups upon it, said, "It's time for Mr. Faylen's medicine."

"They treat you like an infant in this place," said the publicist with a wan smile. "Well, Mike, you finally found me. Sorry I got you into this mess."

Then, "All right, Nurse, I'll take my little pills—and you might give me a pain shot while you're at it."

As he spoke, Faylen's eyes were fixed on Shayne's. He seemed to be trying to give him some sort of message he did not wish to put into words. As the detective got to his feet, Faylen's lips moved briefly and slightly, opening and closing twice—at the moment, his face was turned away from Devereux.

When they departed, Shayne was wishing he had been born deaf so that he could be sure he had read the wounded publicist's message correctly. As it was, he could only render a wild guess.

He could have sworn Dave Faylen said silently, "The kids. . ."

VII

THE BRIGHT semi-tropical sun was well into the western sector of the sky when Devereux and Mike Shayne got back into the Land Rover. The mustachioed self-styled chief executive of the Republic of Oraba seemed thoroughly at ease despite their lack of any escort as he got the rugged vehicle out of the hospital parking lot.

He said, "I'll run you over to Mission Bay and drop you with the rest of the tourist group if you don't mind."

Shayne shrugged. Thus far, he felt as much at sea as ever. The

giant pizza continued to elude any real bite. To date, he liked everyone he had met since he became involved in the island mystery. But he did not let himself forget the fact that he had come within inches of being murdered in Miami the night before or that the man they had left was seriously wounded and, apparently, had been kidnapped.

"How do you like our little operation?" Devereux asked him as they crests the rise of a low lush hill.

"So far, so good," said Shayne. "In fact, so far, very good indeed. What about the native population, though—are they taking it happily?"

Devereux shrugged. "Why not?" he said. "They stand to be a lot better off than they have ever been. Their own homes, their own land, education for their children, plenty of useful work for good pay—why wouldn't they take it happily? They've been neglected for two centuries—first by the British, then by the Bahama Republic."

"What about the United States?" Shayne asked.

"No jurisdiction here. Besides, if Uncle Sam tries to make trouble, he'll be making it against a lot of his own most powerful citizens."

"It sounds as if you've got it made," said the redhead, wondering why the idea seemed so objectionable—the idea of a small private island republic owned and controlled entirely by anoligarchy.

"Oh, I won't try to fool you—there are dissident elements here. There always are. But we don't intend to give them any cause for activist behavior. And if they try it. . ."

He let it hang, his light blue eyes cold as ice.

Shayne said, "Pardon my curiosity, General, but why are you showing me all this attention?"

"Because," said Devereux, "I want Bill Winthrop to hear it from you like it is. He's got some cockeyed idea I'm trying to set up some sort of dictatorship—at least, that's what he says. Lately, he's been spouting the Bill of Rights, claiming I'm too paternalistic. *Bushwah!*"

Again the mustache bristled as Devereux added, "Between you and me, *he* wants to turn Oraba into a glorified private Jamaica, a resort island for the very rich."

"And *you* don't?"

"Not at all." The brigadier dealt the steering wheel a double blow with the heels of both hands. "*I'm* not turning Oraba into a winter playground—I'm making a nation where rich *and* poor can live in safety and comfort. Any questions on that?"

"I'm not impugning your motives," said the detective. "But I

do have one more question to ask you."

"Go ahead." Devereux sounded weary for the first time.

"What about the Winthrop children?" Shayne asked. "Are they under any kind of restraint?"

Again the double-blow on the steering wheel, then, "Shayne, I only wish I could let you talk to them myself."

"Why not, then?" Shayne asked.

It was as if he had uttered a key sentence that unlocked the gates of violence. Once again, they had come up behind the gardener's pickup truck proceeding placidly on its way along the near-empty highway—once again, it blocked Devereux's more rapid progress and once again, gauging his opening with care, the brigadier swerved onto the road's shoulder to pass it on the right.

But this time, the light truck did not yield an inch. Instead, it followed Devereux's move, swinging to the right, effectively blocking the narrow bit of road that remained. As the brigadier braked to a skidding stop to avoid being sideswiped, Shayne made a grab for the door beside him—but not in time.

Before it came to a halt, the Land Rover half-tipped over, catapulting the detective into space, to land with stunning force on the grassy bank alongside the narrow highway. Mike Shayne blacked out. . .

He was jolted back to consciousness to discover himself propped up between two casually clad bodies on the front seat of the pickup truck. His captors wore floppy straw hats pulled well down over their heads so that he was unable to see their faces. The truck was being driven cross-country over the green rolling hills of Oraba and Shayne judged by the sun that mere minutes had elapsed since the near-collision on the highway.

His first thought was for the flat .32 Remington Automatic he had brought with him from Miami—selecting the lighter-than-usual handgun because it would be less apparent to his fellow passengers on the island junket. He slid his right hand carefully inside his jacket to check his shoulder holster, discovered it empty.

Careful as his movement had been, it was sufficient to alert the young body on his right. A clear contralto voice said, "Sorry, Mr. Shayne. We thought we'd better take care of it for you."

"Welcome aboard," said the baritone behind the wheel. "Is Dave okay?"

They went over a series of bumps that made the detective's head throb abominably while he struggled to assess the situation. There was no mistaking those

voices. Shayne had heard their like before during his years in the playground of the very rich.

They were unmistakably American, and as unmistakably the products of careful training in voice placement from the toddling stage of infancy. Wealthy voices. But he had to be sure. He leaned forward to get a look, at the driver first beneath the conceling brim of straw that hid his face.

"Careful," said the female on his right. He felt a gentle jab in his ribs. "No sudden moves."

Shayne turned his head slowly, looked down to see the muzzle of his own pistol held firmly against his side—then up into a smiling, liberally freckled, young face framed beneath the hatbrim with sunstreaked ash blonde hair.

"How *is* Dave?" The girl repeated the driver's question. "We feel dreadfully over what happened to him."

"Resting comfortably," Shayne replied. "At least as comfortably as can be expected for a man with a bullet hole through his left bicep."

"That was a mistake," said the male behind the wheel. "We didn't mean for *him* to be shot."

Digesting this with his head clearing rapidly, the redhead said, "Listen, kids, would you mind telling me what this is all about?"

They exchanged a look across him and Shayne got his first glimpse of the driver's face. It, too, was fair and freckled and fringed with long dark blond hair. They could have been twins.

Shayne said, "What happened to Devereux?"

The driver said, "Oh, he's all right. A bit shaken up, maybe. We had to do what we did to get you, Mr. Shayne. He got by us the first time."

"He thinks he owns Oraba," said the girl.

"He needs a lesson," said the youth. "Driving around alone like that. It was time he learned it's not safe."

They crested another low hill and turned into a twin-rut country lane that was almost as rough as driving cross-country on the island. Shayne wished they would get wherever they were going.

They topped another hill and the ocean lay in front of them and below—looking like hammered copper in the late afternoon sunlight. As they drove down a winding incline, Shayne fought to hang on to his composure or what was left of it.

There had been many occasions, in his past dealings with underworld and half-world figures in the course of his job, when Shayne had grown weary of loud voices, of four-letter words, of general roughness of manner. But this—from first to last, it was

simply too drawing-room polite for a criminal affair.

Dave Faylen, Bill Winthrop's goons, Winthrop himself, the brigadier and now these kids—all were so infernally low-keyed, so considerate in manner, that it was difficult tor him to retain his grasp on the fact that this was undoubtedly a criminal affair all the way.

After all, to date as far as he knew, it had already involved attempted assassination of himself, the wounding of Dave Faylen, the ambushing of Devereux in a road block and now his own abduction. Save that Bill Winthrop and the brigadier were embroiled in some matter of policy for the embryonic island republic, Shayne still had not the faintest notion what underlay it all. And he knew about the policy row only by hearsay.

Since their hillside descent was tricky, they rode the rest of the way down in silence, finally coming to a stop in a rustic driveway that wound through a thick stand of palms. Before them was a low, stone-and-slate structure that was all but invisible in the surrounding foliage, facing a small bay into which a short jetty was outthrust.

"Welcome to Covert Cove, Orville Carr," said the youth, getting out from behind the wheel. He held Brigadier Devereux's ugly but efficient looking automatic weapon under his left arm.

That brought Shayne up short as he followed the girl out the other side. Hitherto, he had taken it for granted that Bill Winthrop had arranged his Oraba trip. Now it occurred to him that the kids were probably working for their father.

Surveying them before him in the golden rays of the sun, he said, "Hello, Billy and Betsy Winthrop."

The youngsters exchanged a glance of mild blue-eyed surprise. Then Betsy laughed and said to her brother, "After all, Mr. Shayne is a *detective.*"

"Right on, Bets," said the youth. "So he detected who we are."

They shepherded the redhead inside the dwelling. As they entered, Betsy Winthrop said, "Please forgive the dirt and disorder, Mr. Shayne, but it's the servants' day off."

Inside, the house didn't look as if it had seen a servant for a couple of years.

It was a pigpen. Clothing, casual and expensive, was strewn around the living room floor and furniture. On an obviously valuable coffee table, cold canned food with opened tops and opened cans of soda pop were piled high. Only of littered ashtrays and empty bottles of liquor, there was no sign.

VIII

THE POWERFUL battery lamp young Billy Winthrop switched on only added vividness to the mess. Betsy glanced at Mike Shayne and shrugged it off.

She said, "We're only camping here."

Shayne found a cigarette and lit it, drawing a dirty saucer to use as an ashtray. He found a perch on the arm of a sofa, said, "Would you two mind telling me what you're doing here?"

The junior Winthrops exchanged a glance, then Betsy said, "I wish you wouldn't smoke, Mr. Shayne, If you must, please blow the smoke the other way."

Billy, looking reedily handsome if unkempt with the floppy straw hat off, said, "Betsy and I have decided to take over the island."

Shayne thought they were joking but masked the incredulity he felt. "You and who else?" he asked. "The native population?"

"Who needs *them*?" Billy Winthrop said.

"Devereux has them all brainwashed," his sister put in. "They're like cattle."

"Just you two?" said the detective.

"Just us," was the reply. "And you'd better believe we can do it."

"Would you mind telling me why?" said Shayne.

"We'd like to show Daddy we're not just pigeons," the girl replied.

"Besides," said Billy, "we want our own island. Devereux, with the help of Daddy's loot, has set it all up for the taking."

"Devereux might make it difficult." Shayne thought of the anti-missile demonstration he had witnessed earlier.

"He's still fighting World War Two," said Billy Winthrop. "We can handle him."

"I thought he and your father were having disagreements," the redhead offered.

The two blond and beautiful young persons exchanged a look. Billy smiled and, for a moment, Shayne thought Betsy was going to giggle.

"We rigged that," Betty Winthrop said.

"It was easy," her brother added.

Shayne couldn't believe his ears. He wondered if these children were actually as mad as they sounded. Kid games! But crimes had been committed. His head was still throbbing from the jolt it had gotten when he was tossed out of the brigadier's Land Rover.

He said, "Did you shoot Dave—and try to shoot me?"

They shook their heads in unison. Betsy said, "That wasn't part of the plan."

"Then who did?"

"Oh. . ." she sounded deliberately vague. "We have friends

over there." This, with a nod toward Miami, two hundred miles away.

Billy Winthrop stood up—he had been leaning against the edge of the table—and said to his sister, "Mr. Shayne doesn't believe us. Shall we show him?"

He picked up the brigadier's automatic weapon, gestured toward a door at the end of the disordered living room. The two of them ushered the redhead into a smaller room jammed with electronic equipment. Everything here looked shipshape and orderly.

Billy Winthrop said, "If you're wondering, Covert Cove has its own power plant."

"That's why we picked it," said Betsy.

Billy went to a small table, picked up what looked like a small computer. Although it was painted coral pink, Shayne immediately recognized it. It was one of those so-called "little blue boxes" with which a skilled user can cut in on or make telephone calls anywhere in the world—without using the regular systems.

"The main phone cable from Jonesport to Mission Bay passes practically under the house," Billy Winthrop said before he donned earphones and got to work. He punched a few buttons on the box, listened closely, an expression of intense concentration on his face, then said, "Daddy? This is Billy—Sister and I hope your speech went okay this afternoon."

A few moments of listening, then, "Of course, we're okay. No thanks to General Devereux, though. We've got Mr. Shayne here with us. He talked to Dave and he'll be okay."

Another pause, then, handing an earphone to the detective, "Daddy wants to talk to you."

Winthrop, Senior's, voice had a rasp of anger and fatigue beneath its velvet surface. He said, "Mike, I want you to get the kids off the island before Devereux does them any harm. If I weren't stuck here in Sao Paulo. . ."

Shayne was about to reveal some home truths to the billionaire when the muzzle of his own pistol was pushed almost into his face and Betsy removed the mouthpiece from his hand and handed the box back to her brother, who broke the call without another word to his father.

"We don't want Daddy to know *too* much," said young Winthrop. End of call."

Shayne's head had finally cleared and he was beginning to think in high gear. His first reaction to the frightening charm of his captors was that they were psychotics. But, in a way, their actions and reactions made sense.

Here they were, children of the very, very rich, brought up together in virtual seclusion from the world, sheltered against kidnapers and accidents while they received the finest education available through carefully selected private tutors, with their mother dead and a father absent on weighty affairs more than nine-tenths of the time.

They radiated intelligence—from the equipment around them and the ease with which he handled the coral pink little blue box, the detective surmised young Winthrop was probably an electronics genius. Perhaps the girl was equally talented in this or other directions.

But they might as well have been savages brought up on some desert island, isolated from all civilized human contact. Now, turned loose with their own money and talent and lack of worldly discipline, they might as well have been insane, as primitive humans must always be dangerous and a little mad when plumped into a civilization beyond their understanding.

A pattern was taking shape in Shayne's head for the first time since Dave Faylen's call spoiled his dinner with Lucy Hamilton at the Steakhouse. Something, more likely somebody, had set these brilliant and dangerous children off on their manic course. *Something or somebody. . .*

The pattern lay there, murkily, beneath the surface of his conscious mind. Yet Shayne was very much aware of it. He was also aware that the time for action was at last upon him.

Understandably, Billy and Betsy Winthrop basked in the assurance of their own value as human bric-a-brac. Their whole upbringing had assured them that they were precious far above other mortals if only because of the power of their father's name and fortune.

Their seemingly insane self confidence was soundly based in awareness of the fact that nobody could afford to hurt them. Thus far, they believed themselves

protected by the armor of Winthrop invulnerability. Shayne wondered if either of them had ever been spanked.

Probably not, he decided—or, if they had, the rash governess or tutor had paid the penalty of dismissal, which in its way was as bad for the childrens' character.

Shayne's first active chore, he decided, was to destroy this illusion that they could not and would not be hurt. The only problem was—how?

By this time, young Billy Winthrop was busy with his bootleg telephone device, calling Miami, apparently talking there to friends named Pete and Banco, informing them that he and his sister had Mike Shayne safely in hand.

The redhead wondered what they wanted him for anyway, did not, however, doubt for a moment that these dangerous children of wealth had a purpose in abducting him and letting the brigadier to his way apparently unscathed.

Could it be they were working for Devereux *against* their father? Shayne wondered. However unlikely, with these two nothing was impossible.

Betsy put an end to his ruminations, saying in admiring tones, "Billy made the box himself. He painted it pink so it wouldn't be simply another 'little blue box.' "

As she spoke, she opened her hands in a gesture of sweeping appreciation—and in her right hand she was still holding Shayne's Remington .32.

It was all the opening the detective needed. Leaping like the asphalt jungle tiger he was, Shayne grabbed her right arm with both hands, spun her around until he was behind her, lifted his right knee and brought her forearm down hard on the iron muscles of his thigh. If her diet had been deficient in calcium, he would have broken at least one of the bones. As it was, the sudden pain caused her to drop the automatic and utter a sharp animal yelp of anguish.

Shayne brought the inner edge of his left hand hard against the left side of her slender neck, blacking her out completely, then made a dive for his pistol, which had slithered under a folding metal table containing electronic gear.

He intended to get the weapon before Billy Winthrop could make a move, but the youth's snakelike speed surprised him. As Shayne's fingers touched the metal of the gun, a foot crunched down hard on the back of his reaching hand. If the youth had not been wearing tennis shoes, the hand could well have been crushed.

As it was, the pain was momentarily sickening, and the

redhead got a knee in the left side of his head that missed his temple.

Forgetting the pistol, he rolled clear, ricocheted from a metal cabinet against the wall, barely evading a kick in the face, kept rolling until he was on his feet by the door of the living room with the billionaire's boy in hot pursuit, his face a mask of outraged fury.

Shayne sidestepped his rush, planting a short, sharp left jab squarely in his solar plexus, doubling up the youth like a folding cot. Ordinarily, he would have followed the jab with a kayoing right chop to the corner of the jaw—but his right hand was still numb, so he stuck out a foot and tripped him instead, bringing his left down in a rabbit punch at the base of the boy's skull.

Billy Winthrop slid across the living room carpet on his face, coming to a hard stop head first against the coffee table with a satisfying *thunk*.

When Shayne turned, Betsy was coming at him, brandishing a heavy steel wrench. He ducked her wild swing easily, came up inside and gave her a knee where it would hurt the most, causing her to collapse in sobbing sickness on the floor.

Make it dirty, he thought. *Give these kids a taste of what it's really like. . .*"

IX

IT WAS stalemate. The kids were sullenly submissive after the working over Mike Shayne had given them, but they stubbornly refused to talk. The three of them sat in the disordered living room, the kids on the sofa, the detective on the edge of the coffee table.

In his hand, Shayne held his Remington .38. Brigadier Devereux's short, deadly looking automatic rifle lay at his left side, the illegal little blue telephone box at his right.

It was dark outside and, save for the electric lantern behind him, there was no light in the house. With increasingly grim quiet intensity, the redhead asked the three questions whose answers he needed most.

"Who shot Dave Faylen?"

Silence.

"Who tried to shoot me?"

Silence.

"Who put you up to this whole caper?"

Silence.

Over and over again, Shayne put the questions, from time to time adding, "I can keep this up longer than you can."

Silence.

He wished to hell he could use the bit of electronic wizardry on his right—he had an idea that a phone call or two might give him at least some of the answers he sought. But electronics, beyond

wiring the motor of a locked car so that it would start, were simply not his bag.

Shayne dared not let either of the kids use it. The fact that he had bested them physically did not cause him to underrate their cleverness. If he let either of them use the little box, God only knew what message they might get out before he could stop them.

They knew perfectly well he was not going to kill them—as always, this knowledge was their most valuable weapon. They were equally certain he was not going to torture them further—not physically at any rate.

Silently, the redhead cursed the power of the countless Winthrop millions. The mild working over he had given them might be forgiven, but any more of it would not. Shayne would have to be a lot crazier than these kids to invite the lasting wrath of Bill Winthrop and the mighty conglomerate power at his command.

Thus far, he judged, Brigadier Devereux had not dared risk punitive action against the kids—and Devereux packed plenty of multiple clout in his own right. Neither had Dave Faylen, in whose charge the young Winthrops had been placed.

Back to the questions again. . .

"Who shot Dave Faylen?"

Silence.

"Who tried to shoot me?"

Silence.

"Who put you up to this whole caper?"

Silence.

Suddenly, Betsy said, "My belly hurts."

"Shut up, Sis," said Billy. "So does my arm."

Silence, but with a new aura.

There had been some sort of message in the quick look the youngsters exchanged as they broke the shroud of stillness in which they had wrapped themselves. Shayne could feel it like a charge of electricity in the cool air of the room.

He knew what it was—anticipation. These kids were waiting for something to happen, expecting it. But what? The redhead could feel the short hairs at the nape of his neck stir and stiffen.

He had not long to wait. . .

Suddenly, the room's semi-darkness was broken by brilliant rectangles of bright light flooding through the windows with their undrawn shades. For Shayne, it was unexpected—and since he was facing the windows, momentarily blinding.

Magnified and distorted by a bullhorn, Brigadier Devereux's voice split the post-twilight silence. It said, "If you do not come out with your hands locked behind your necks, we will open fire in exactly thirty seconds."

Shayne was in no mood to argue. He slid from the table to his feet, said, "Come on, kids, let's get it over with."

The move took him out of the glare of light and he glanced at the sofa—to see that the younger Winthrops were no longer seated there. Listening as he was to the roar of the amplified voice, he had heard no sound within the room. Billy and Betsy were—gone.

"Fifteen seconds," the brigadier roared. "And we mean business this time. Ten seconds. . ."

Shayne moved. He had no desire to put Devereux to the test. As he stepped toward the front door, his foot came down on an empty can of baked beans that had been dislodged from the cluttered table when he made room for himself to sit there.

He went over, landed sprawling on the floor, face down, just as the deadly clatter of an automatic weapon firing a short burst further shattered the silence of the tropic night.

Devereux meant business—or did he? Shayne could hear the slugs rip through the solid oak door and whine over his head to thud into the far wall. One, diverted by a hinge, struck an unopened can on the table immediately above and behind him, causing an infernal clatter as the short burst abruptly ceased.

The detective's silent query as to the brigadier's intent was caused by the fact that the fire *was* high—too high to hit anyone inside. And, while gunmen untrained in the firing of automatic weapons invariably *did* fire high, Shayne doubted that Devereux's men were such amateurs.

But where bullets were firing, there was always danger. Shaken by his fall, the detective kept low as he scrambled for the riddled door—to be greeted by a second burst of automatic fire that came closer than the first and again caused him to hug the floor flat. Somewhere in back of him, he heard glass shatter.

But there was no glass to shatter on that side of the room—of that he was certain—or was he? He was no longer unsteady as the adrenalin of fury surged through his veins. He had been shot-at, misled, kidnapped and generally bamboozled and almost made a fool of long enough in the course of this crazy, kid-gloved, dangerous caper.

Well, his gloves were off now—as were those of his attackers. If, in fact, they were attacking *him*. . .

Crouching low, Shayne lurched around the table and surveyed the wall in the reflections of the light cast by the searchlight flooding it from outside. At first, he saw nothing save unbroken wall partly blocked by a large de-

corative, native woven blanket he had noted before.

Beneath it, at the base on the floor, he saw pieces of broken glass. Behind it had to be a window.

He grabbed the gun the kids had taken from the brigadier and used the butt to clear out the rest of the glass behind the blanket, now perforated with bullet holes. It struck something firm beyond the glass, something that yielded ever so little.

Outside, the brigadier's amplified voice roared, "Come out in ten seconds or we're coming in!"

Silently suggesting what Devereux could do with his summons, Shayne struck three swift blows with the butt end of the stumpy weapon—and felt the barrier give as another brief burst of automatic fire sent slugs and splinters ricocheting around him.

He got the whole mess cleared as the lethal racket halted, pushed the blanket through and scrambled after it—to find himself in a narrow, overgrown squeezeway between the house and the hill that rose directly in back of it. No wonder, he thought, the window had been boarded up. It had to be an architect's blunder, especially during the rainy season, when the living room would be flooded.

As Shayne worked his way along the narrow passage, toward the Cove end of the house, the soft sound of a muffled marine engine greeted his ears. He rounded the corner of the edifice in time to see a darker shadow leaving a luminous wake

as it disappeared around the northern point of the cove with only a vanishing wake behind.

The kids had escaped by water. But how in hell had they got out of the house?

He scanned the structure for some sort of water-facing exit, heard a voice from inside come echoing around the corner he had just turned. "This way, General," it called in unmistakably British accents, "They must have got out through the window."

My God! he thought. *In this case, even the goons have drawing room accents.*

Then he saw it—almost directly under his feet.

It was an old-fashioned cellar door, that evidently led beneath the house. Two factors prevented his exploring it at the moment—one, the fact that he had no flashlight, the other that the man pursuing him through the living room window was, by the sounds he made thrashing through the overgrowth behind the house, close behind him.

Shayne moved on, hugging the dwelling wall, turned the corner toward the front door before he was spotted from the rear. In sound military fashion, Devereux had left a trooper, clad in khaki shorts and helmet and armed with a submachine-gun, on guard at the front door. A pair of Land Rovers stood there, headlights and searchlights turned on full and directed against the front of the house.

Keeping carefully outside the patterns of light, Shayne moved up behind the sole sentry, who was peering through the shot-open front door, jammed his pistol into the man's back.

"Let's have your weapon," he said. "Keep your mouth shut."

The man handed over his gun meekly enough and the detective marched him out of the light before the one coming around outside caught up with them. He waited by the two vehicles, behind the lights, keeping his captive covered. His follower came in view, saw the sentry was not at his post, decided he must have gone inside and followed.

"*Now*!" Shayne ordered the hapless trooper. "I want you to go inside and tell your general to come out. Tell him Mike Shayne will start shooting if he does not come out immediately, alone and unarmed."

The detective took up a post between the Land Rovers and waited, the submachine-gun covering the house. He had dropped the automatic weapon the young Winthrops stole from Devereux while breaking through the boarded-up window.

"All right, Shayne, I'm coming out," the brigadier called some seconds later. "What the hell are you talking about shooting *me* for? We came here to rescue *you*.

Had the devil of a time finding the place, too."

"Do you always come in firing first?" said the redhead.

"Dammit, we were firing *high,*" Devereux replied.

"Some of your ricochets were flying wild," Shayne told him.

"There's always the off chance, of course," Devereux admitted. "But those damned kids. . ." He let it tail off, looked around, added, "We didn't hit them, did we?"

"Not as far as I know," Shayne told him.

"Where in hell *are* they, Shayne?"

"They got away by boat."

"Oh, my God!" cried the brigadier. "We'll never catch them now. They'll get away clean and we'll have it to do all over again."

X

DEVEREUX LOOKED drawn and haggard in the glow of the Land Rover headlamps and searchlights, as if he had had a bellyful of the mischief caused in Oraba by a mere pair of wild and wealthy teenagers. Shayne felt almost sorry for him.

"They won't get away if they get where they're going first," Mike Shayne said.

"They *told* you?" Devereux sounded incredulous as he and Shayne got into the front seat of one of the vehicles from opposite sides.

"No," Shayne admitted, "but there's only one place they'll be heading for—Idle Rest."

"What's there for God's sake?" The brigadier got his powerful motor started.

"The man who put them up to it—the man who's been behind all the trouble in your little republic."

Devereux looked at Shayne hard for a long moment. "You've got to be kidding!" he said.

"Oh, no I'm not," Shayne assured him.

Shouting to his little squad of troopers to follow, the brigadier got the Land Rover in gear and they were off on a cross-country ride to the highway, a ride even more toothrattling than Shayne's afternoon trip had been.

Somewhere along the hilly, bumpy way, they lost their following car, but the brigadier neither slowed down nor stopped. He sighed with relief when they finally reached the paved surface and turned north. Shayne echoed him.

It was going to be just the two of them against the others—granted they got to the hospital in time. . .

They did, but by a hair. The infirmary was in a state of near-hysteria when they arrived. Two denim-clad young folk had bro-

ken into the private room where Dave Faylen lay and taken him out through the window, preventing pursuit with the threat of ugly looking weapons.

Brushing aside excited protests, Shayne and the brigadier went through the window after them, raced down to the water at the foot of the hill on which the hospital stood and reached the shore just as their quarries were pushing off in a swift looking hovercraft.

"Better not try!" Devereux shouted. "One bullet will put that craft out of action."

The kids responded with a burst of automatic fire that flattened the detective and his companion behind the jetty that led to the inlet beyond. Shayne heard the lowpitched thrum of the powerful engines as they caught and, risking counterfire, rose to send a burst through the left pontoon of the craft just getting under way.

It swerved to a jerking stop, all but tipping over, then raced in wild tight circles until one of the trio on board finally gave up and cut the switch.

They came wading ashore half a minute later, two thoroughly drenched denim-clad kids and a bedraggled Dave Faylen with his arm still in a sling. There was no resistence as Shayne and Devereux helped them onto the little pier.

There, Billy Winthrop sank to the planking and began to sob like an infant. His sister watched him coolly for a moment, then turned away with a disgusted gesture and said, "Billy always was a crybaby at heart."

Shayne looked at Faylen long and hard, said, "What in hell made you try it, Dave?"

The publicist shrugged, then winced and rubbed his wounded arm with his free hand. He looked like a caricature of his well-groomed self in sopping wet hospital pajamas and even wetter looking grey flannel robe.

Faylen said, "I guess I just couldn't resist it. Not that it happened overnight, mind you. When you've spent a lifetime covering up for other men, trying to conceal their follies and glorifying whatever scraps of merit you can find in them. . ."

A pause, then, "When you've put in years promoting their pet projects and doing your damnedest to keep their sins out of the media, you tend to get an urge to show them up for the idiots they are."

"It was all my idea," said Betsy gallantly.

"The hell it was!" Faylen put her down hard. "If you think it was your idea, it's because I planted it there."

"Would it be too much to ask just what the idea was?" Devereux asked as his other vehicle put in a belated appearance.

CHIEF WILL GENTRY

Faylen said, "Well, I had the kids on my hands, with all that wildness and talent—*and* money—and nothing to do with them. And a major policy split developing between Bill, Senior, and the brigadier here—both of them my clients. I could see the whole Oraba project was going to founder if somebody didn't pull them together—and I've seen enough projects founder in my day."

"What in hell *was* this policy split about, Dave?" Shayne asked.

Devereux opened his mouth to speak, but Faylen cut him off, saying, "I can slice it down the middle, Dev—*please!*"

Devereux subsided and Faylen went on. "Dev, here, was set on an independent technocratic state. Bill, who has enough money to launch or sink Oraba and write it off either way, saw it wouldn't work. Somebody—the British or the U.N. or the C.I.A.—was bound to put a stop to it. Bill wanted a loose dominion status within the Republic of the Bahamas with a minimum tax bite."

He glanced at Devereux, who shrugged, then nodded. The publicist resumed his explanation.

"When I saw the split widen, I thought, 'To hell with both their houses! Let the kids take it over.' At any rate, this would keep them busy and get them out of Miami before they got into trouble with our mutual friend Chief Will Gentry.

"I figured *we* could work out our own deal with the Bahama Republic and keep Oraba going with the memberships it already had. We could even turn both Bill and Dev a nice plump profit to keep *them* happy."

"What went wrong, Dave?" the detective asked.

"Nothing went wrong with the plan—but Bill and Dev began to get too damn close to a shooting war. Then I got orders from Bill to pull you in, Mike, to get the

kids off Oraba before the big trouble started. I caught up with you by phone at the restaurant, and right after that, I found my pad at the Cap Ferrat was under surveillance. So I cut out to wait for you at your place."

When the publicist paused, Shayne said, "Dave, who shot you? And who in hell tried to shoot me?"

"I'm damned if I know," said Faylen. "But if I don't get into some dry clothes, I'm due for pneumonia."

Billy Winthrop, who had stopped weeping and got to his feet, spoke for the first time.

"That was our fault, Mr. Shayne. We didn't want you here to take us back to Miami when things were about to get rolling. So we called a couple of friends in Miami and asked them to take you out of play temporarily. They overdid it, of course, trying to kill you. Then they shot Mr. Faylen by mistake and had him flown over here."

"The minute Mr. Shayne got involved, everything started to go wrong," said Betsy Winthrop bitterly.

"Then why in hell did you bring me here?" the detective asked.

"We decided it would be better to have you here under our thumbs than running loose either here or in Miami. We wanted to keep you and Mr. Faylen apart like this afternoon."

"We didn't make it," Billy Winthrop said. Then, to the brigadier, "What are you going to do—shoot us?"

The brigadier regarded them thoughtfully. "I think we'd better leave that to your father."

The young people exchanged a frightened look and seemed to shrivel where they stood.

Shayne said, "I'd like to call the Miami Police and see what they have on a pair of hoods named Pete and Banco."

IT WAS LATE the following afternoon when the long meeting in the private conference room of the Mission Bay Inn finally broke up. After hours of argument and explanation, Bill Winthrop and Brigadier Devereux had finally hammered out an acceptable compromise plan for Oraba. The representative of the Republic of the Bahamas who, with Mike Shayne sitting in, made the fourth party present at the meeting, had obtained by telephone the provisional assent of his President to a loose dominion agreement.

As for the young Winthrops, a determined looking yet chastened billionaire said, "I'm going to take charge of them myself, something I should have done years ago. But I've been so damned busy. . ."

Dave Faylen was pensioned off on condition he retire from public relations for good and never set foot again in either Oraba or Miami Beach. In the matter of the mysterious Pete and Banco, Chief Gentry's Miami Detective Bureau had several felony charges against a pair answering the descriptions wrung from Billy and Betsy Winthrop. The unsavory two had departed for places unknown, but the M.P.D. had issued an All Points Bulletin on them. It would be a minor miracle if they avoided capture.

Continued in our next . . .thought Shayne. Sooner or later, Pete and Banco would be brought to justice, if not for known crimes already committed or attempted, for felonies to come. The redhead was willing to settle for that—unless they cropped up in his path again, which was extremely unlikely.

He was crossing the lobby of the luxury inn when he saw a cluster of well dressed, well fed looking people gathered just inside the front entrance. One of the men spotted Shayne and hailed him.

"Oh, Mr. Carr," he said, "where have *you* been? We haven't seen you since luncheon jesterday. I hope you enjoyed your visit here as much as we have."

"I've found Oraba very—profitable," said the detective, caressing his jacket's right breast. He could all but hear the crackle of the fat check Bill Winthrop had given him after the conference broke up.

"Are you coming back with us, Mr. Carr?" one of the ladies asked.

"Why not?" Mike Shayne replied. He had had enough of Oraba to last at least one lifetime—*his*.

READ: In the Next issue of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE:

DEATH CALLS THE PLAYS

The New MIKE SHAYNE *Short Novel*

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The problem the Miami Dolphins' general manager calls on Shayne to solve, with the AFL championship at stake, is not merely to track down the source of the telephone threats that otherwise will sideline the team's great rookie wide receiver—but to keep the jittery young athlete alive until the opening whistle shrills.

A WOMAN SEVEN FEET TALL

by ROBERT W. ALEXANDER

Any man's plaything she had been. . .no man's woman. She could lie with a smile, kill with a brilliance that matched her diamonds. Could I get behind that velvet front to the killer of Millionaire's Beach?

THE HIGH-RISE building edging the sand at "millionaires beach" is named Shangrila. The huge grounds are walled with a fifteen foot fence of decorative stone and there is only one private road to the impressive building.

Sergeant Doug Norris raced the squad car down the private street and squealed the tires turning into the only entrance to Shangrila. He was forced to brake to a quick stop. The driveway was formidably barred with a striped black and white lift gate like a railroad crossing.

A guard in uniform stepped from a windowed shelter and bent down to view the two officers with disapproval for their fast entrance. "Whom do you wish to see?"

"Police!" Doug Norris announced impatiently. "We're from homicide!" Norris was thirty-eight with thirteen years on the force, but this was his first homicide case where he was in charge. "Open the gate!" he ordered.

"Yes, sir." The guard was totally unimpressed with his tone of authority. He had a book and pen in his hands. "May I have your names? It's required."

"Sergeant Doug Norris. This is Lieutenant Scott Michel. We're here on a homicide call. Get a move on!"

"Certainly, sir," the guard answered as he continued to write their names down. He finished. "Now would you show your indentification, please?"

Doug Norris swore under his breath as he fished his wallet

out. He was a veteran of battling hotheads with his fists while telling them their rights and he was tempted to get out and open the gate himself. But Lieutenant Scott Michel obligingly flashed his card with the badge pinned across from it, and Doug Norris reluctantly did the same.

"Thank you, gentlemen. You may drive to the building and park in a reserved stall. I hope you're aware that the mangement will appreciate your inconspicuous conduct while you're here?"

When he raised the gate Norris deliberately got a little screech from the tires as he accelerated forward. Lieutenant Scott Michel was amused. He was forty-six, a soft-spoken veteran of eighteen years in homicide, and due a promotion if Norris proved he could take his place. He said: "He was just doing his job."

"He was doing his job on me!" Norris parked and when they got out he looked up at the huge building. "Some layout. Where do people get the dough to buy their own apartments in a place like this? You ever been here?"

"No. My circle of friends aren't in this bracket. You noticed the guard wasn't expecting us?"

"No surprise. Station's five minutes away." Norris checked his watch. "Hasn't been ten minutes since the dame called."

Lieutenant Michel winked. "Don't imagine it was a dame—"

The meaning of Scott's wink didn't escape Doug Norris. They were on high-level ground and it would be wise to investigate with finesse and step on few toes. "Sorry, I meant a woman," Norris apologized. "She gave her name, Miss Emalene Wydle. Sounds rich, huh? She probably just called us. Didn't want to break the serenity here by shouting her husband had just been murdered. How do you like that? Has a husband and calls herself Miss!"

There were two entrance doors into the lobby of Shangrila, one for visitors and the other for resident-owners. Guards manned both doors and Norris wisely chose the one for visitors.

"Your business, sir?" the guard stopped him.

"Police." Norris saved time by showing his badge.

"Whom do you wish to see?"

"For starters, a Miss Emalene Wydle. She phoned that her husband was murdered ten minutes ago in apartment One-A."

The guard stiffened. "I see. Very well, I'll have an usher escort you there immediately."

"We won't need an usher."

"I'm sorry, sir. All visitors here are accompanied to and from apartments *"in Shangrila."* Norris grimaced at Scott Michel who smiled and nodded to accept an usher. Seeing his approval the guard beckoned to one of a half dozen waiting ushers seated inside.

"Apartment One-A," the guard told the young man in the gray and gold uniform, then pushed the button that opened the glass doors for the officers to enter Shangrila.

The usher led them down the plush carpet toward the beach side of the building. They passed a small shop offering drugs and sundries, a banquet room, small theatre, and finally a large restaurant mostly empty before lunch. It was 10:47. Norris asked the usher his name.

"Ernest Rettuh. Most call me Ernie."

"Work here long?"

"Since Shangrila opened a year ago."

"Kind of strict, aren't they?"

"Not for a total security building. Look around later. You'll see all kinds of celebrities, but nobody bugs them."

"Must cost a fortune to buy in here?"

"If you have to ask, don't bother. Or are you interested?"

"Just curious."

"Don't pay in here. I wouldn't even talk to you, but I saw you flash the badges to the day man. One-A is the corner apartment on your left. First class! Ground floor with a beach view." A confidential grin spread his face. "Don't mention I asked, but, ah—is Herb in trouble?"

"Who is Herb?"

"Herb Butler. He married Miss Wydle."

"That made her Mrs. Butler, huh?"

"Hah! It's more like he's Mr. Emalene Wydle, know what I mean?"

"Stick around, may want to talk to you."

"I figured. Sure, I'm on 'til four."

Ernie Rettuh pushed the button on apartment One-A and they waited.

Every entrance into Shangrila had a guard and the rear exit to the beach was no exception. Across the hall inside a glassed cubicle a guard sat ready to operate the doors for people he recognized. He was staring at the two officers with the usher.

"Should be in," Ernie shrugged. "She seldom leaves."

Norris looked through the wall of tinted glass at the exit. The beach was deserted except for one woman sunbathing. The terrace, at least ten feet down the steps and level with the sand, had only one couple using the colorful deck chairs.

Miss Emalene Wydle suddenly opened the door. She was in a wheel chair. Ernie quickly asked if she was expecting visitors and when she nodded, Ernie turned to Norris. "Ring for an usher when you're ready to leave." Rettuh left.

Miss Emalene Wydle said, "You made good time. Come in."

Lieutenant Michel introduced them and added, "Sergeant

Norris will be in charge." He had seen the body on the floor near the beach window.

Doug Norris had been appraising Miss Wydle. She was slim, very plain featured, and about thirty-five. From a male's viewpoint, her only sex appeal was her nice and thick dark hair, and it could be a wig.

The body was sprawled face down by the front window with the ocean view. He and Michel quickly made a careful examination and determined that his skull had been caved in. From all appearances he had been dead a very short time. Norris got off his knees and took out a note pad.

"He's your husband?"

"Yes, he was."

"What's his name?"

"I knew him as Herb Butler."

Norris wrote it down. The dead man had been at least seven or eight years younger than she. And he was obviously good looking and tall. "Does he have other names?" the sergeant suddenly asked.

"I wouldn't know."

"Uh, huh," Norris wrote more. The woman was answering almost mechanically. She was probably still in shock. "When did you discover the body?"

"I was here when it happened."

"You saw him murdered?" Lieutenant Scott Michel blurted, then apologized to Norris, "Sorry, I'll phone the coroner."

Norris grinned, out of view of Miss Wydle, as Michel walked to the telephone. He could imagine how Michel felt to stand by as an observer. Norris turned back to Miss Wydle.

"Same question. Did you see who killed him?"

She met his eyes. "Yes, I did."

"Do you know the man?"

"It wasn't a man."

"A woman? Do you know her?"

"I can truthfully say I didn't recognize her."

"How did she get in?"

"I suspect she was here all along."

Norris shot a glance at Michel that implied he might have an unstable woman on his hands. Michel hadn't missed a word even while calling for the coroner. He hoped Norris would ask for a description and Norris didn't disappoint him.

Miss Wydle thought a moment. "She was tall. She stood very tall!"

"Six foot? Smaller? Larger?" Norris asked.

"Larger. The woman stood eight feet tall."

Sergeant Doug Morris cringed. "Eight feet?" he protested. "Oh, com'on, Miss

Wydle, Surely, you can judge better than that. Why a woman that tall would scrape her head on the ceiling."

She thought about it. "Yes, I suppose you're right. Her head didn't hit the ceiling."

"Okay, then. But you'd estimate her over six feet?"

"Definitely!"

"Guess her height. I've got to put down a description."

"Well . . . Put down seven feet, Sergeant."

"Seven feet," Norris unhappily wrote on his pad. "What did she look like?"

"Tall."

"Sergeant," Michel called as he hung up the phone. "Give her a moment. This only happened twenty minutes ago." He addressed Miss Wydle. "We're rushing questions at you in case there's a chance to apprehend the guilty party."

"Oh, I understand," she answered as she turned her wheel chair to face Michel. "I'm quite all right. Go ahead with your questions. It's just that I can't describe the woman in detail. It all happened so fast. It was suddenly over and she was gone."

"She go out the door?"

"Well, the door is the only exit. When you check you'll find the windows are all screened and barred, and there is also quite a drop."

"But you didn't see her go out?"

"No. Immediately after she struck him the second time. She hit him twice." She bit her lip as though recalling the moment. She nodded. "Yes, he was lying on the floor unconscious from the first blow, and she delivered—how do you say?—the coup de grace. I immediately pushed myself to the kitchen and dampened a towel. I attempted to revive him. I moistened his face and blotted the blood on the back of his head. When I realized he was dead I called you. As I say, the woman who killed him has vanished."

Lieutenant Michell volunteered, "I'll check the apartment." He glanced in the kitchen then walked through the living room and checked

the bedroom and bath. Norris stopped him in the bedroom and whispered, "Looks open and shut. She killed him."

"Would seem so. But if the guard in the hall saw a woman seven foot tall walk out of here—"

"Fat chance. I'll ask, of course, but—"

"Ring the front for an usher."

Norris grimaced. "Hell! This is murder! They can't interfere with an investigation. I can get a court order and search every apartment in this building without an usher!"

"You're in charge," Michel nodded.

"Yeah!" Norris sullenly agreed. Michel was right. Any toes stepped on around here were the wrong ones. He shrugged, "I'll phone for the manager to come down here. If he cooperates we'll go ahead quietly. Okay?"

"Sounds sensible." Scott Michel grinned.

The manager came directly to apartment One-A. He was a large, efficient man, under fifty, and impeccably dressed. He viewed the body with a glance, said the one word, "unfortunate," then with precise words expressed his condolence to the woman in the wheel chair.

She acknowledged with a nod. Mr. Ferriman, the manager, then inquired if the coroner had been called. When informed he picked up the phone and made arrangements for them to enter by a service entrance.

His next words were to the detectives. "Please keep your investigation confined to this apartment. Residents here must not be disturbed."

His take-charge manner annoyed Norris. Norris bristled, "We may have to roam all over this building—if it takes a court order to do it!"

Mr. Ferriman nodded, but in no agreement. Without anger he said, "I doubt if you could. There isn't a judge in the county who'd risk the jeopardy. It would take a great deal of time. Understand, I offer full cooperation to resolve this as quickly and quietly as possible. However, if you persist with this pugnacious attitude, I'll make a call and have you removed from the investigation in five minutes."

"I don't doubt that you could," Norris admitted frankly. "Okay, your cooperation is all we need. If we should find it necessary to question a resident here, we'll call you first."

Mr. Ferriman nodded. "Thank you. I have an usher outside to escort you where you please. You may freely question

the employees." He turned to Miss Wydle. "Is there any way in which I can make this easier for you?"

"It's quite all right, Mr. Ferriman."

Mr. Ferriman bowed to her and left. Norris followed him out the door and found Ernie standing there. "I want to see the exit guard."

Ernie Rettuh walked him over to the cubicle across the hall and Doug Norris asked him how long he'd been on duty.

"All morning," the guard answered.

"See anyone enter One-A this morning?"

"Yes. Herb—Mr. Butler."

"See any one come out this morning?"

"No."

"How about a woman seven foot tall?"

"Huh?" the guard squinted. He shook his head. "I sure didn't."

Norris walked back to the apartment with Ernie beside him. He stopped outside the door and asked, "Did you know her husband?"

"Herb Butler? Sure do. He was an usher here like me. Used to wheel her to the dining room a lot. He was a charmer, you know. What happened? He steal something valuable from her?"

"No, somebody killed him."

Ernie was astounded. "Unbelievable! In there?" he motioned a thumb at One-A. Doug Norris ordered him to keep it to himself. Ernie agreed. "Right. I make good money keeping the eyes, ears—and the mouth closed."

"How long they been married?"

"Since Easter, about six weeks."

"What kind of a guy was he?"

"Cool dude. Great con artist with the broads. And he has a cute little blond, Sue Colucci. A waitress here. They share a pad up at Sunset beach. Split the rent."

"Did it end when he married Miss Wydle?"

"Hah! Not even a week. He tears up there half the time."

"This Sue Colucci. Is she seven foot tall?"

"Man, are you kidding? No, she's a sexy little five-foot blond"

"Okay. Thanks for telling me."

"Don't thank me. Mr. Ferriman personally gave the word to answer all your questions. Which means a bonus in my next paycheck."

Doug Norris entered the apartment and told Miss Wydle that the guard had not seen a woman seven feet tall, or anyone for that matter. She wasn't

disturbed. She nodded, "I told you she vanished."

Michel announced, "I called the gate for you. Neither Miss Wydle nor Herb Butler have had a visitor the past four months come through the gate. Also, there isn't a resident or employee seven foot tall."

Norris nodded. "Miss Wydle, what did this giant woman hit him with?"

"A club."

"What kind of a club?" Norris insisted.

"A round one, about two feet long."

"Made of what? Wood? Metal?"

"Could have been cotton. I don't know."

"Well, hardly a cotton club, Miss Wydle." Doug Norris shrugged. "I'm sorry, but you seem to be the only one with the opportunity."

She nodded. "I suppose. You'll also learn I had motive. My foolish husband was cheating on me. I was the one who was foolish! I thought money could buy—Anyway, I hired a private investigator to learn where he was spending his nights. The detective called me this morning. My husband was sharing an apartment with some blonde up the coast. I thought the money I gave him ended the affair."

"I see," Doug Norris nodded. "You were angry. When he returned this morning—"

"To ask for more money!"

"Yeah. Then you hit him with the club?"

"What club?"

"The weapon that killed him!"

The arrival of the coroner and his men interrupted further questions and while they went about their gruesome chores Norris and Michel searched the kitchen for a club. There was a built-in stove and range, a huge gleaming refrigerator, but nothing in the cupboards and cabinets that could have been used for a club.

Scott Michel said, "She couldn't have thrown it out a window. These screens are screwed on from the inside and the paint over them proves they haven't been removed. Living room's the same. I looked."

"We'll find it." Norris looked at the wet towel in the sink. It was a white bath towel and there were blood stains on it. "One part of her story checks. She did try to revive him. Wonder why? I kind of feel sorry for her. Handicapped in a wheel chair and the best defense she can think of is a seven-foot woman who vanished."

"She told me she has been crippled all her life. You'll have

to check it. The D.A. insists on a neat package."

"What more is there when we find the club? We got motive, and opportunity!"

"We also have a woman confined to a wheel chair who supposedly brained her tall husband in the head. How did she reach him? Ten to one the autopsy will read a downward blow killed him."

"So she tricked him to bend down, then bashed him."

"With what?"

Doug Norris groaned. "Not you, too! It's gotta be in the apartment!"

The coroner and his crew, having received instructions from a superior, were finished and ready to leave in record time. The coroner told the detectives he'd have a report for them in a couple of hours. They wheeled the covered body out and left.

Norris told Miss Wydle they'd have to search the apartment for the weapon. She said, "Please do whatever's necessary."

A diligent search of the living room, bedroom, and bath did not uncover a single item that could have been used for a club. Norris was baffled. They were in the bedroom and he discovered that Scott Michel was studying him as though he expected him to think of something. Norris suddenly snapped his fingers. "She could be sitting on it!"

"Possibly. Another thing, I shouldn't offer advice. But this one is touchy. We don't know that she isn't telling the truth."

"What? There's a guard right across the hall. He didn't see a seven foot woman or any other woman go in or out of here."

"Suppose he was bribed?"

"No way! It would have to be total conspiracy by the guards, the ushers, the gate men. Maybe even the management! Hell! How many women seven feet tall have you ever seen?"

"None, I can recall. Can't you thing of a way that somebody, a seven foot woman, even, could get into this apartment and only have to bribe the one guard out there?"

"Well . . . sure! Swim in from the ocean off a boat. Come early when the beach is deserted. Oh, brother! Let's see if she's sitting on the club, first!"

Doug Norris walked into the living room and explained the problem. "We've searched everywhere for the club, except your wheel chair and your person. Until we do that we can't say the weapon isn't in the apartment. I'll send for a woman officer—"

"Oh, that won't be necessary. If you gentlemen will allow, I'll change into a sunsuit in my

bedroom. You may then examine my clothes and the chair."

"We appreciate it."

She was in the bedroom ten minutes before she called them in. She was lying on the bed wearing a yellow and brown sunsuit looking rather frail and defenseless. Her legs were thin from lack of use, but her arms and shoulders were full and healthy from pushing her chair.

Norris examined her clothes and chair without finding a thing. He glanced at Michel to see if he was thinking the same thing he was. Michel shrugged slightly. Norris said without blushing, "I wonder if you'd mind getting back into your chair with us watching?"

For the first time a trace of a smile appeared on her face. "Of course, sergeant. I really don't have use of my legs, but I understand. You must make certain I haven't transferred the club to the bed and am lying on top of it."

"Yes, ma'am."

She swung her feet to the floor and rather expertly shifted herself into the wheel chair.

"I've had lots of practice," she said.

Norris thoroughly searched the bedroom and bath again in case she had hidden the club when she changed clothes. He thanked her and told her they would be back in a little while.

Ernie Rettuh escorted them to Mr. Ferriman's office and the manager had his secretary send them right in. Norris came right to the point. "What do you know about Miss Emalene Wydle? We think she killed her husband."

Mr. Ferriman nodded. "I wouldn't be surprised from what I saw down there. I've made a few inquiries. The guard down there said no one has been in or out of her apartment this morning, except Herb Butler. He entered about nine thirty this morning, I expect you've learned. I'm fairly certain you can believe the guard, Jerome Lucewitz. Miss Wydle, of course, is a recluse. Always has been, I'm told. She is very rich, and, she is a very lonely woman. If she has friends they haven't come to visit in the year she's been here. No male friends, no dates. Her attorneys contact her by phone or mail."

"What about her marriage?"

"A surprise to us! And all people, one of our ushers!" He spread his hands. "Well, she is thirty-six and I suppose—We would have terminated. Mr. Butler if we'd had any idea what he was up to. We're careful who we employ, but a thing like this wasn't anticipated."

"Did you expect the marriage to last? Scott Michel asked.

"No! Never! It was doomed from the start. Ernie must have told you the type of man he was. I assumed she'd write him a check when she tired of him, or learned what he was."

"Then she didn't have to kill him to get rid of him?" Norris asked.

"Certainly not. If it took a million dollars—Mr. Butler would have settled for far less—it wouldn't interrupt Miss Wydle's life style. She is that rich."

Norris thanked him for his time and they left to question the guard. Michel casually said, "She didn't have to kill him, which is a point in her favor."

Norris retorted, "We don't know the club isn't in her apartment."

"We don't?" Michel grinned.

"We just know we didn't find it." Doug Michel suddenly snarled at Ernie, "And you keep a closed mouth!"

"I'm deaf and dumb," Ernie Rettuh assured.

The guard, Jerome Lucewitz, had been relieved for lunch. He was in the employee's dining room at a table by himself. He had seen the body removed, and after Mr. Ferriman's ques-

tions he knew the detectives would be after him next. He watched Ernie lead them to him.

Norris asked about his record. "You ever been arrested?"

"No! Except for traffic tickets." Lucewitz bristled. "Hey! Why me? What am I accused of?"

"You're not accused of anything, yet. But you told me that no one but Herb Butler entered Miss Wydle's apartment this morning."

"I wasn't lying! Why should I?"

"You could have been bribed. The facts are, someone slipped in there and killed him, then walked right out past you. And that adds up that you were bribed and you're lying!"

Jerome Lucewitz slammed his sandwich to the table. "Oh, no it doesn't!" He glared at Ernine wondering what he'd told them. "It couldn't be done," he had switched back to the sergeant. "Not even if I was bribed with a million bucks!"

"I'm listening. Explain it to me."

"Yes, sir! You check with the patrol on the beach. They're on duty twenty-four hours. So are the guards on the roof with the binoculars."

Ernie Rettuh backed the guard. "He's right. There's a watch dog patrol on duty at all times. No one could swim in from the ocean and cross that sand without being seen. Besides celebrities, quite a number of dignitaries visit here to relax. Most of them stay in government owned apartments. No reporters, assassins, or anybody can slip in."

Lucewitz added, "There's even a patrol boat out there. Satisfied?"

"Yeah, sorry to disturb your lunch." Norris got up and asked Ernie if he could bring the waitress, Sue Colucci, to the dining room.

"Sure. Coffee's free here. Help yourself and grab a booth."

At the coffee urn Norris taunted Michel, "That blows your theory."

Michel grinned. "The game is to cover all possibilities. The D.A. likes a neat package. Remember, that's the name of your job."

"I'll hand him one if I can find the club she used," Norris said as they seated themselves in a vacant booth. There were about forty employees in the dining room and most of them were glancing their way.

Norris said, "The word of Herb Butler's murder has spread."

"It was bound to. They wheeled the body out through the service entrance."

Ernie brought a small girl to the booth. She was blond, about twenty-two Norris guessed, and her brown eyes were rounded. He motioned for her to sit down and said, "I have bad news for you."

"I heard, but I can't believe it. Herb wouldn't kill her!"

Doug Norris bit his lip. She thought Miss Wydle had been killed. "It's the other way around. Herb Butler was murdered."

"Oh, my God!" she gasped. "Everybody said it was Miss Wydle! The stretcher was covered, but we all assumed . . ."

"Did he have any enemies?" Norris interrupted her.

"None that would kill him. He—Gee, I don't know what to say"

"Were you in love with Herb Butler?"

"Well, not really. Say, you don't think I killed him! Herb and I just had an understanding. Sort of a bad habit, for me, anyway. He—well, he was good looking. Listen, he married Miss Wydle for money. And she gave him plenty! I told him he ought to stay away from me until he called it quits with her. But Herb said it didn't matter. He said Miss Wydle had a detective following him, and the sooner she knew he was still seeing me, the sooner she'd pay him off for a divorce."

"Do you think Miss Wydle killed him?"

"I don't know. Nobody goes in her apartment, except the maid"

"Maid? Is there a maid seven feet tall on the staff?"

"Hardly. Did Miss Wydle kill him?"

"We're here to find out. Thank you." Norris dismissed her. He told Ernie to escort them back to apartment One-A.

Miss Emalene Wydle had changed back into her clothes when she opened the door for them. She rolled her wheel chair toward the window as they entered. "I assume you've learned all about me?"

"Enough," Norris said.

She stopped and turned the chair to face them. "I hardly think so. Do you believe I stood up and struck him?"

"No, I think you tricked him to bend down."

"I see. Well, I don't think it's a point of issue, anyway. With further investigation you'll learn the circulation in my legs is poor. They frequently have to be rubbed by a masseuse"

"Don't tell me there's one seven feet tall!"

"No, very few women reach that height."

Scott Michel couldn't contain himself. He asked, "So your husband rubbed them for you?"

"Yes. It must have been dis-

tasteful for him, but he pretended otherwise. Actually, he was quite good at it." She sighed. "He managed to prove his talent before I married him." She added quickly, "Which is neither here nor there. But it was a ruse for him. He invariably asked me for money while he rubbed my legs."

"Did he rub your legs this morning?" Norris asked.

"Yes, when he finally came in. You know, I gave him more than ample spending money. Bought him an expensive sports car. The fool could have had anything he wanted if—" She was suddenly quiet.

Norris said, "So, you hit him with the club while he was rubbing your legs?"

"With what club, sergeant?"

"With the club you've managed to hide, so far."

"I told you a woman eight feet tall—"

"We decided it was a woman seven feet tall."

"You did, sergeant. I'm feeling tired, would you mind coming back another time?"

"Miss Wydle. You have the motive, and apparently you are the only one who could have killed him."

"I'm glad you said, apparently! I allowed you to search to your heart's content and you found no weapon. Therefore it must be assumed that someone had to carry it out of this apartment. Very likely the seven foot woman I told you about."

Michel suggested, "We can come back."

Sergeant Doug Norris was dubious. He allowed Michel to walk him out of the apartment to where Ernie was waiting. He said to Rettuh "Would you mind standing over there out of hearing?"

"Sure," Ernie said.

Norris said, "It just occurred to me. She could have handed the club to an usher to get rid of it."

"Possibly. But with the time involved—the coroner told me it looked like we arrived ten or fifteen minutes after he died. That didn't give her much time to plan."

"She planned before he got home! Premeditated!"

Michel shook his head. "Regardless what you think, you've got to produce the weapon, especially in this case, before you make the arrest. Besides, if she handed the club out the door, the guard would have seen."

"Maybe he's the one who took it."

"And did what with it?"

"Hid it in his cubicle over there. I'm gonna check!"

Ernie walked him across the

hall. Jerome Lucewitz groaned, but he got up and allowed Norris to search the desk. Norris stalked back to where Michel was waiting.

"Nothing," he growled. He bit a thumbnail. "Do I have to produce the weapon?"

"In this case, yes."

"Scott, I need help."

Lieutenant Scott Michel smiled without humor. "I was afraid you were going to ask. I'm sorry, I haven't anything brilliant to offer. Some cases take a long time and a lot of digging. And some are never solved."

"Hell, Scott I know she did it."

"I think you're right, but without the weapon, well—Go over your notes. Maybe something will click."

Norris whipped his note book out and began reading the answers she had given. He read through them all and was on the items they had found in the apartment. He came to the towel in the kitchen sink. Norris looked up.

"I'm going in there and read her her rights," he said. "Then make the arrest."

"What have you come up with?" Michel asked quickly.

"That towel. What's a bath towel doing in the kitchen sink? She said she got it from the kitchen, and she did! She was giving me straight answers, except about the woman seven feet tall."

"Slow down," Michel cautioned as Norris pushed her door button. "What about the club, what did she use?"

"A cotton club. I'm curious if she'll admit it."

When Miss Wydle finally opened the door she sighed when she saw them. "You didn't give me much time."

Norris recited her rights and asked if she understood them. She said she did and Norris said, "I'll have to place you under arrest."

"Oh, have you found the weapon?"

"Miss Wydle, I know what weapon you used for a club. A towel!"

"How could I possibly do that?"

Norris said slowly, "You took a bath towel to the kitchen. You rolled it into a club and soaked it in water. Then you froze it!"

"You certainly have a vivid imagination—"

"So do you, Miss Wydle. It's exactly what you did. You might have resoaked the towel and frozen it several times to give it heft. It was certainly a lethal weapon. When your husband came home you got it out of the refrigerator without his notice and—"

"You could never prove a story like that!"

"We'll see. It was clever of you to say you used the towel to try and revive him. Not only for the blood, but in case our lab technicians discovered tap water in his wound. No, the hot water you ran on the frozen towel while we were on our way here, didn't wash off all the blood."

"I explained! Do you insist on an arrest with nothing but that evidence?"

"I'm afraid so. Do you agree, Scott?"

Michel had recovered his surprise. "I'm sorry, Miss Wydle. Would you like to call your attorneys from here?"

"I certainly would!" She smiled suddenly. "I'm not too surprised, you know. I was entirely honest with you. However, my attorneys are clever men and I don't anticipate your theory of a frozen club will hold water."

Doug Norris grinned. "I can see you don't. But off the record, why did you give that wild tale of a seven foot woman?"

"Sergeant, it takes a giant of a woman to kill a worthless man." She wheeled about and rolled to telephone her attorneys. Lieutenant Scott Michel could picture the action she would get, and the important people who would be calling each other and get involved.

While she was on the phone protesting the charge as "ridiculous" and demanding immediate action, Michel worriedly motioned Norris aside.

"We'll have to send for an ambulance to take her and the wheel chair to the station. With kid gloves!"

Norris asked, "How did I do? Neat enough package?"

"Damned if I know. Would a rolled towel, frozen, be enough of a weapon to cave in a man's skull?"

Norris grinned. "Damned if I know. Depending on its size, ice is hard enough."

"Yes, but if it was large enough, is she strong enough to handle it?"

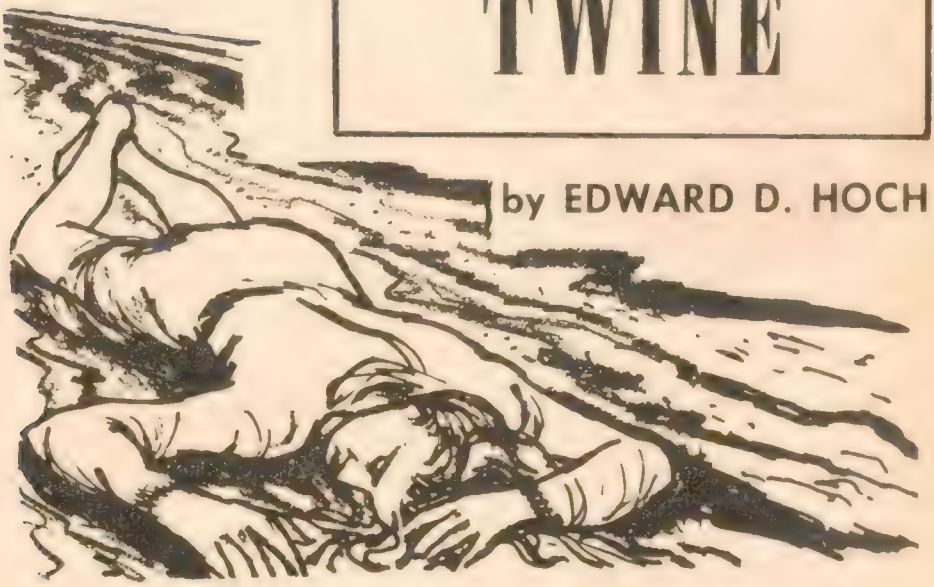
"Let them argue it out in court. I see it that she was furious her money didn't buy Herb Butler. Probably spurned and denied for the first time in her life"

"That's what it looks like."

"Sure . . . she plotted. And helpless as her legs might be, did you notice her arms and shoulders were full and healthy and the bulge of muscles? Yeah, Miss Emalene Wydle wanted the pleasure of knocking his brains out." Doug Norris winked. "And any woman inspired to seven feet tall could have done it."

TWINE

by EDWARD D. HOCH



As sure as the thread that Ariadne spun, Sam Garner knew that the old man's hobby led to a strange end.

THE MAN BEHIND the hardware counter said, "Yes, twine. The old guy collects twine. Been doin' it for maybe twenty years now, ever since about the time his wife ran off with another man."

My eyes followed the progress of the tall man as he moved carefully between a display of power mowers and a stack of packaged fertilizer. From his left hand he trailed a loop of thick brown twine that he'd just recovered from the store's trash. I would have guessed his age at close to seventy, though it was difficult to tell with any degree of accuracy.

"Do you know him well?" I asked the man behind the counter.

"Just as one of the neighborhood characters. Name's Sentin Brock. He's retired from a civil service job. They claim he's got a ball of twine that fills a whole room in his apartment."

I found it hard to believe. "A whole room?"

The counter man shrugged. "So they say. Why don't you do a story on him for your paper? It ought to make a feature."

It was a possibility. We ran a weekly feature on unusual hob-

bies, and certainly a man who'd collected twine for twenty years would seem to qualify. I thanked him and asked if he knew Sentin Block's address.

"That big old apartment house on the corner of the next block. I don't know the number, but that's where he lives."

I went outside and walked down the block. It was a mixed neighborhood of older apartment buildings and specialty shops, hovering on the edge of lower middle class. I generally stopped here on the way from work, when I needed something at the hardware store. Today, with the temperature hovering near ninety and no rain in sight, I'd remembered we needed a new sprinkler for the yard.

I put the sprinkler in the trunk of the car and stood for a moment deciding what to do. I could phone Brock the following day from the office and request an interview, or I could go up there right now and try for one.

I decided there was no time like the present.

The building where Sentin Brock resided was one of the oldest in the neighborhood, but the landlord had kept it in good repair. The entrance was brightly painted and well lit, and I had no trouble finding Brock's name on the directory. I climbed the stairs to the third floor and knocked on his door.

"Who is it?" he called without opening it.

"Sam Garner. I'm with the *Daily Telegraph,* Mr. Brock. I'd like to speak to you about an interview."

The door came open a crack, but I noticed that the chain lock stayed on. "What d'you want to interview me for?" the old man asked.

"You're Sentin Brock?" I asked him.

"Yeah," he answered suspiciously.

"We run a hobby feature every week in the paper, Mr. Brock. Maybe you've seen it on Saturday mornings."

"Maybe," Brock conceeded.

"They tell me you have a twine collection that's quite spectacular."

"Who tells you?" he snapped.

"I think I heard it at the hardware store."

The door closed momentarily and I heard the chain being removed. "I guess you can come in."

The apartment was clean and well-furnished in the style of twenty years ago. I saw nothing in the place that looked more recent. Even the television set was a model long since consigned to the junk pile by most families. "Nice place you have here, Mr. Brock."

"It's home," Brock replied. "Sittin' room, kitchen, two bedrooms and a bath. All I really

need. Don't entertain very much any more."

"About this twine. . ." I nudged.

"I have it in a large ball. Twenty years' worth, in here."

I followed him into the nearest of the bedrooms. The ball of twine did not fill the room, as I'd been led to expect, but it was still a considerable sight. I guessed it to be better than five feet in diameter, tightlywound and knotted with care.

I ran my hand over its surface in admiration. "It's a beauty," I conceded.

"I got enough twine there to stretch around this whole city."

"That'll be handy if it starts to come apart."

"Huh?" he said, densely.

"Tell me how you started collecting it."

"'Twas after my wife left me." He gestured toward the bureau where a framed picture stood. He was tall and handsome. She was a head shorter and maybe ten years younger. It was an old story. "I needed something to occupy me at night, something to keep my hands busy."

"I see." I'd taken out a pad and was making a few notes as he talked. "What would your wife think if she came back now and found this big ball of twine in the bedroom?"

"She won't be back," he answered firmly.

"Do you ever hear from her?" I asked.

"No. Not since the day she ran away with my partner. And I won't, now. She probably thinks I'm dead by this time." He patted the ball of twine as if it were his child, smoothing the ends, preparing to tie on the day's acquisitions.

"Mr. Brock, if I came back tomorrow with a photographer, do you think we could get a picture of you with your ball of twine?"

"I guess so."

"Fine. Then I'll be back." I held out my hand and was surprised by the firmness with which he shook it. In that instant I had my first real look into his deep gray eyes. He was an aging eccentric, yes—but I thought I saw something more there too.

Something I couldn't quite put a name to.

AS I PULLED into the driveway I saw that Vera was out in the rose garden, digging weeds. She looked up and brushed the dirt from her hands. "You missed dinner," she said simply. "The kids and I ate without you."

"Sorry I didn't call. I stopped at the hardware store and then decided to interview someone for a story."

Vera looked up, smiling without humor. "Was her name Angela?"

"God, Vera, I haven't seen

Angela in months! You know that!"

"You haven't been late for dinner in months either."

"Let's not start all that again," I pleaded. "Angela is over! I was late and I'm sorry!"

Vera followed me into the house and fixed me a sandwich while I played with the kids. For a long time she didn't talk, but finally she asked, "Who did you interview?"

"Guy with a big ball of twine. Thought it might go as a Saturday hobby feature."

"A ball of twine?" she stared at me incredulously.

"But big! Takes up most of a room and it's growing all the time. He's been doing it for twenty years, since his wife left him." I told her in detail about my visit to Sentin Brock.

"The man's mad, Sam. You're not going to publicize that, are you?"

"So he's mad. Aren't most hobbyists?"

"Not like that! Not with a ball of twine filling a room!"

"It's taking the place of his wife," I said. "For all I know, maybe he kisses it every night."

We watched television for a while and went to bed a little after eleven. The heat of the day had tired me, but sleep would not come easily. I stretched out in bed and stared at the dark ceiling.

"Vera?"

"Hmmm?" she murmured.

"You awake?"

"I am now," she said resignedly.

"I was thinking about Sentin Brock."

"Who?"

"The man with the ball of twine," I explained.

"Oh." She didn't sound too enthusiastic.

"Vera, what if his wife never left him? What if she's still there?"

"Where?"

"Inside that ball of twine. What if he killed her and—"

"My God, Sam! That's horrible!" she was awake now. She sat up.

"I didn't say it was true. But what if—"

"Go to sleep, for God's sake! You're giving me nightmares!"

"It might be, Vera. He looked crazy enough. His eyes. . ."

She stopped me short. "I won't talk about it! Go to sleep!"

"There'd have been the odor at first, of course. But maybe if he wrapped the twine tight enough, and thick enough, it would be like the Egyptians wrapping a mummy. She was a small woman, at least on that picture."

"Go to sleep!"

But the vision didn't fade with the coming of the dawn. I wakened with the image of that big ball of twine still before me. Vera didn't mention it at break-

fast, and neither did I, but I knew it was on both our minds.

I spent the morning in the newspaper morgue, looking through old clippings. The only thing we had on Sentin Brock was an item in the business column from twenty-six years back, announcing the formation of a small printing company under the name of Brock & Winner, Incorporated.

I checked our file of local phone books and discovered that the company had been listed for seven years, disappearing just nineteen years ago. Next I checked the current book for a phone in the name of Winner. There were three, and I started calling them.

The first number went unanswered, but on the second I found what I wanted. "Is your husband there?" I asked the woman who answered. "This is the *Daily Telegraph* calling."

"He's at work."

"Would he be the Winner who owned a print shop some years back?"

"That was his brother, Claude."

"Oh. Is he still in town?" I asked.

"Moved to California. Long time ago. Maybe twenty years now."

"I'm especially interested in his wife," I pressed on.

"Claude never married."

"A woman named Brock?" I prompted.

"That was a long time ago! So long ago I'd just about forgotten it."

"Didn't she go to California with him?"

"Say, what's this for? You're not goin' to publish this in the paper, are you?" The voice was almost hostile now.

"No, no—it's just background material. We're running a feature on Mr. Brock, and he happened to mention that his wife ran off with Winner."

"Well. she did no such thing! We always suspected Claude went out to California to meet her, but if that was the case, he was disappointed. She never showed up."

I thanked Mrs. Winner for the information and hung up. Nothing she'd told me had discouraged my bizarre notion of Mrs. Brock's fate.

After lunch I put in a request for a photographic assignment and drew a young bearded cameraman I knew slightly. "What is it this time?" he asked. "More politicians congratulating each other?"

"A man with a big ball of twine."

"You're kidding!"

"Wait and see."

SENTIN BROCK welcomed us to his apartment, and stood proudly by his creation while the photographer snapped away. "I'd told the neighbors I'll be in the paper," he said. "Will it be this week, do you think?"

"More likely a week from Saturday," I replied. "I haven't finished the story yet."

The bearded photographer went off to his next assignment, but I lingered at Brock's apartment. "More questions?" he asked.

"Maybe." I went into the bedroom and put both arms around the ball of twine. "You know what would make a great story? If we could roll this down to the street and unwind—"

"Get your hands off that!" he shouted, lunging at me.

"Hold on, hold on! Why so excited?"

"Just— Look, you've got your story. Now get out!"

"Just one more question, Mr. Brock." I edged past him toward the door. "What really happened to your wife?"

"Get out of here!" He almost shouted it.

"Is she in there, Mr. Brock? Is that where she is? I found out she never went to California with your partner. She just disappeared twenty years ago, didn't she?"

"Get out or I'll call the police!" His voice was edged with panic.

"All right," I said, going out the door. "But I'll be back."

On the way home that evening I tried to decide what to do. I could write the story as I had it and forget about what might be inside that big ball of twine. Or I could fill the story with my speculations and end up with a nice fat libel suit against me and the paper. Neither of those possibilities seemed satisfactory, and that only left one alternative—to tell the police what I knew, or suspected.

Vera was awaiting me at the door. "She called just now, Sam. You were late and you missed her."

"Called? Who called?"

"Angela, of course. Who else? Or is there more than one now?"

"Oh, for God's sake, Vera! Cut it out!" I snarled.

"When I answered she pretended she had the wrong number. But I recognized the voice!" Vera's voice was shrill.

"I don't even know if Angela is

still in town." I tried to placate her.

"Don't lie to me, Sam."

I walked past Vera into the house. There was no sense talking to her when she was in these moods. And I had more important things on my mind.

I phoned police headquarters and asked for Sergeant Matthews, a detective I knew who trusted my judgement.

"How are you, Sam?" he said as he came on the line. "I was just goin' home."

I carefully explained what was on my mind. He listened, grunting from time to time, and said finally, "What do you want me to do, Sam? I can't ask a judge for a search warrant to unroll a ball of twine—not on the basis of what you've given me. It's all too speculative."

"I know it is, Sergeant. But I have a hunch about this one." I told him.

He was silent for a few seconds. Then he said. "Your hunches have been pretty good in the past, Sam. I'll go out tomorrow and talk to Brock. That's the best I can do."

"Thanks, Sergeant."

That night I dreamed of a giant ball of twine, rolling after me down a hill. Like those snowballs in cartoons, it kept getting bigger as it rolled. When I woke up I didn't mention the dream to Vera. She already thought I was a bit wild on this whole Brock business.

I went down to the office and started getting together some items for my weekly column on city life. It was nearly noon when Sergeant Matthews phoned.

"I checked out that Brock, Sam. The guy with the ball of twine. Nothing to it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the missing wife is back. I talked to her," he added.

"Back!" I exclaimed.

"That's right."

"Back, after twenty years?" I asked.

"Yep. She was in California, and she decided to come home."

I was never one to believe in coincidences, and I wasn't buying this one. "What did she look like, Sergeant?"

"Tall woman, elderly. Husky voice."

"I see," I said. I thought I did, too.

"She seemed quite pleasant."

"Was Sentin Brock in the apartment at the time?" I enquired.

"She said he'd gone off to the store. I waited around, but he didn't get back before I left."

"Sergeant, I saw a picture of Mrs. Brock. She was a short woman, and quite a bit younger than her husband."

"Then who—?"

"That was Brock himself, masquerading as his missing wife!"

"Could be," the detective admitted. "If it was, he sure took me in!"

"I told him I'd be back. He must have guessed I might call the police."

"Yeah," Sergeant Matthews grunted.

"Do you need any more proof, Sergeant?"

"That's no proof, Sam," he insisted.

"Get a search warrant for that ball of twine."

"Sam. . ."

"We've got to move today, Sergeant, before he can get rid of it somehow."

Suddenly the detective reached a decision. "All right, Sam—meet me there in an hour."

Senton Brock opened the door when we knocked. He smiled at me and turned to Matthews without thinking. "How good to see you again, Sergeant."

That was all Matthews needed. "You didn't see me the first time, Brock. That was your wife—remember?"

The old man let out a cry of rage and tried to run past us to the door. Matthews grappled with him and managed to get the handcuffs onto his bony wrists.

Then we set to work unwinding the ball of twine.

THE KIDS were playing in the driveway when I got home. I'd written my story and turned it in for the morning edition, along with the picture of Brock and his ball of twine that we'd taken the day before. It wasn't exactly the hobby story I'd planned to write.

"Did you finally finish with that business?" Vera asked me.

"All done. You'll read about it in the morning paper, if it doesn't make the evening news."

"You mean she was there?"

I nodded, washing my hands at the sink. "She was in there. And a pet dog too."

"How horrible!"

I shrugged and didn't say much. It hadn't been pleasant.

After dinner, while Vera was putting the kids to bed, I glanced down the cellar stairs and noticed the light was on in my workroom. I went downstairs to turn it off.

I had no reason to look in Vera's laundry room. I hardly ever did. But this night something made me open the door.

I didn't know what it was at first, spread out in lengths across the floor, looking a bit like a giant spider's web. Then I realized that it was twine. She'd bought a dozen rolls or more, and unwound them in the basement floor.

I closed the door and went back upstairs.

"Vera?"

"Yes, dear?"

Then I saw her eyes, and I knew I didn't have to ask the question.

DEATH OF A BOOKIE

It was a little case of suicide. But Bates knew that the Coroner could pencil in . . "Murder" . .

by

HERBERT HARRIS

DETECTIVE-SERGEANT Montague Bates was pleased with himself.

After all, he had only recently been promoted, and this was his first major assignment. He believed he had it all nicely sewn up, too, and could hand the whole thing to Superintendent Coleford on a platter.

The latter had been on the point of leaving for a fortnight's holiday in Cornwall, and didn't seem at all pleased at having a major case tossed into his lap at the eleventh hour.

Monty Bates eyed Coleford warily, trying to hide his self-satisfaction under a veneer of calm efficiency.

"Sorry this should have delayed your holiday, sir," he said.

Superintendent Coleford made an impatient gesture with his cigarette. "It shouldn't delay it

long, Bates. It's a straightforward suicide, isn't it?"

Bates answered carefully: "It did look like a cut-and-dried suicide at first glance, sir, but now. . ."

Coleford raised his hand. "Look, Bates, I don't know very much about this affair at all. You'd better start from the beginning. This chap Jackling was a bookmaker, wasn't he?"

"Yes, sir," Bates nodded briskly. "He was found in this office. . ."—he paused to glance at his watch—". . . five hours ago. That is, at seven o'clock. Clarkson, the caretaker here, noticed a light in the room through that glass fanlight over the door. He knocked, and there was no answer. He tried the door, and found that it was bolted on the inside.

"Clarkson got some steps from a cupboard at the end of the corridor—where he keeps his brushes and brooms, and so forth—and peeped through the fanlight into Jackling's office. The bookie was in this chair here with his body sprawled across the desk. Quite rightly, Clarkson didn't attempt to force the door, but phoned for us at once.

"Well, when we arrived here, Clarkson explained to us that Jackling had shot home the bolt on the inside of the office door. We forced the door, and found the bookie sprawled across his desk, just as the caretaker had said.

"The doctor estimated he had been dead about two hours, perhaps a little more, which fixed the time of his death at somewhere between four-thirty and five in the afternoon. There was no doubt about the cause of his death. It was cyanide poisoning. And, in fact, on the desk, close to the dead man's hand, was a small phial—empty. Analysis showed that it had contained cyanide."

Superintendent Coleford switched his keen eyes towards the office door. "You say the door was bolted on the inside? And there's no other way of getting into this office except by the window?"

"None at all, sir. And the window is three floors up from the street, with no connecting balcony or ledge. It looked as if Jackling had bolted himself in; perhaps absent-mindedly, or perhaps to prevent being disturbed."

"Did he have any motives for suicide?" Coleford asked.

The young detective-sergeant smiled grimly. "He had at least two, sir. First, he appeared to be having trouble with his wife. The caretaker had heard them quarrel only the day before yesterday —Thursday. Then we took a peep at Jackling's books, and they don't look at all healthy."

"H'm," Coleford nodded. "So it did look like suicide?"

"Yes, sir," Bates agreed, "but just glance at this." He handed the Superintendent a note-pad. "This was lying on the desk in front of him. You will see that Jackling was making pencil notes on the pad at the time he died. And you'll notice that there are names of horses, prices, and calculations concerning stake monies."

"Well?"

Bates simply couldn't conceal a small note of triumph. "The notes are in pencil, sir, but there was no pencil on the desk. There was no pencil *in* the desk, on the floor, or anywhere on Jackling's person."

Coleford frowned thoughtfully. "But surely he could have made these notes earlier?"

"No, sir." Bates shook his head. "The last entry on the pad shows that he had calculated his winnings on Brown Mercury—a horse which won the four-thirty race at Epsom today. Jackling obviously got the result by telephone in this office, and must have died immediately afterwards."

The Superintendent grunted again. "So you think the absence of the pencil shows that somebody must have pocketed it *after* Jackling died. And yet. . .the door was bolted on the inside?"

Detective-sergeant Bates smiled proudly, and walked over to the door. "Would you please come outside a moment, sir?"

Coleford watched curiously while his junior went to the cupboard at the end of the corridor and returned presently with a pair of steps and a broom.

Bates handed these to the Superintendent and said: "Now sir, if I go inside and close the door, you will see that you can quite easily climb the steps, push your arm through the glass fanlight, and slip the bolt home from the *outside* with the aid of the broom-handle."

Coleford drew his thick brows together and glared at Bates. "Are you trying to teach your grandmother to suck eggs?" he demanded.

Young Bates colored and swallowed. "In that case, sir, I assume that you take my word for it."

"Of course!"

"Very well, sir. Now, if you wouldn't mind climbing the steps and taking a look at the lower ledge of that fanlight—"

Coleford ascended and said

presently: "Yes, I see what you mean, Bates. Very interesting. A thick coating of dust, and—oh, yes—some nice handprints." He paused, and then smiled maliciously. "These *could* be the handprints of the caretaker, couldn't they—when he climbed up to look in?"

Bates was ready for that. "One of them could be, sir, but not both. You will notice that one of the prints is of a left hand and that the second finger is missing."

The Superintendent coughed. "Yes, excellent, Bates," he said grudgingly, descending from the steps. "And now all we've got to do is to round up everybody with only three fingers on his left hand." He eyed the young detective-sergeant rather fiercely.

"Coming down for a moment from the realms of fantasy, Bates," he added acidly, "has it occurred to anybody to talk to the bookie's widow. . .Mrs. Jackling?"

Bates flushed slightly, and said: "Detective-sergeant Wilson called at the Jackling's flat, sir. But Mrs. Jackling had gone away to Brighton for the weekend. We learned as much from the woman in the next flat, who also knew where Mrs. Jackling was going to stay at Brighton, which was useful.

"So Wilson went off straight away to Brighton, sir." Bates studied his wristwatch, noted that it was now past midnight, and added: "The way Wilson drives, sir, he ought to be back pretty soon. And if I'm not much mistaken, I think we shall hear something pretty interesting about a character by the name of George Darby."

"PHEW," muttered Detective-Sergeant Wilson, thumbing back his trilby. "He was a proper packet, that George Darby, sir. I thought for a moment that he was going to do for the lot of us!

"It took myself and a couple of chaps from the Brighton H.Q. to hold him down. And then later, down at Brighton H.Q., the chap cried like a baby, sir. Obviously one of these psychopathic cases."

Superintendent Coleford said: "And Mrs. Jackling was spending the week-end with him?"

Wilson smiled. "That's right, sir. Mrs. Jackling is one of these brassy blonde bits. She and this George Darby were staying at a plushy joint there, doing themselves well.

"Apparently Darby had been working for Jackling for some time, and at the same time systematically robbing him. Hence Jackling's financial difficulties.

"Then, it seems, Jackling had got wind of it, and Darby realized that he had to get rid of Jackling, not only for that reason, but because he was having an illicit af-

fair with Jackling's wife, and the bookie was in the way. So he hit on the idea of the pencil. . ."

Coleford and Bates exchanged a significant glance, and the latter was still trying not to look too pleased with himself.

Wilson went on:

"Apparently Jackling always chewed a pencil, biting the end continually while he was making notes. George Darby, who had been a chemist at one time, constructed a false tip to the pencil and introduced cyanide into it.

"He left this in the usual place on Jackling's note-pad. He followed Jackling to the office. This was late on Saturday afternoon.

"The building was deserted. He could watch what was happening to Jackling by climbing some steps and looking through the fanlight. When he was quite satisfied that Jackling was dead, he entered the office, took the poison pencil away, and left a tiny phial which had contained cyanide near Jackling's hand—to suggest he had committed suicide.

"Just to make the suicide look even more convincing, he hit on the notion of bolting the door on the inside. He got the steps and the broom from the cupboard in the corridor, and working from the outside, he pushed the bolt home with the broomhandle. Ingenious, sir, don't you think?"

"Yes, very," Coleford admitted. "But Darby made two serious errors. He didn't substitute another pencil for the one he took away. And he forgot that the ledge of the fanlight was dusty, and left a handprint. Oh, by the way, Wilson, did you notice if Darby had lost a finger on his left hand?"

Wilson gave the Superintendent an admiring look. "Yes, sir, we did notice that. Apparently he had it blown off when he was working as some sort of backroom boffin during the war."

Young Detective-sergeant Bates smiled and said: "Well, it's a good thing that Superintendent Coleford was quick enough to notice the missing pencil and the three-fingered handprint."

Coleford gave his junior a broad smile in return. It was full of appreciation. Dammit, he thought, these young detective-sergeants knew a thing or two when it came to achieving promotion by pleasing their seniors.

NEXT MONTH: A TRULY BRILLIANT NEW STORY

By JERRY JACOBSON

A Rope Through His Ear

It was war, he knew, a war between himself and the men at the customs desk. And, of course, in war everything's fair, even if it involves a very small vase with a long, curious history.

by JAMES HOLDING

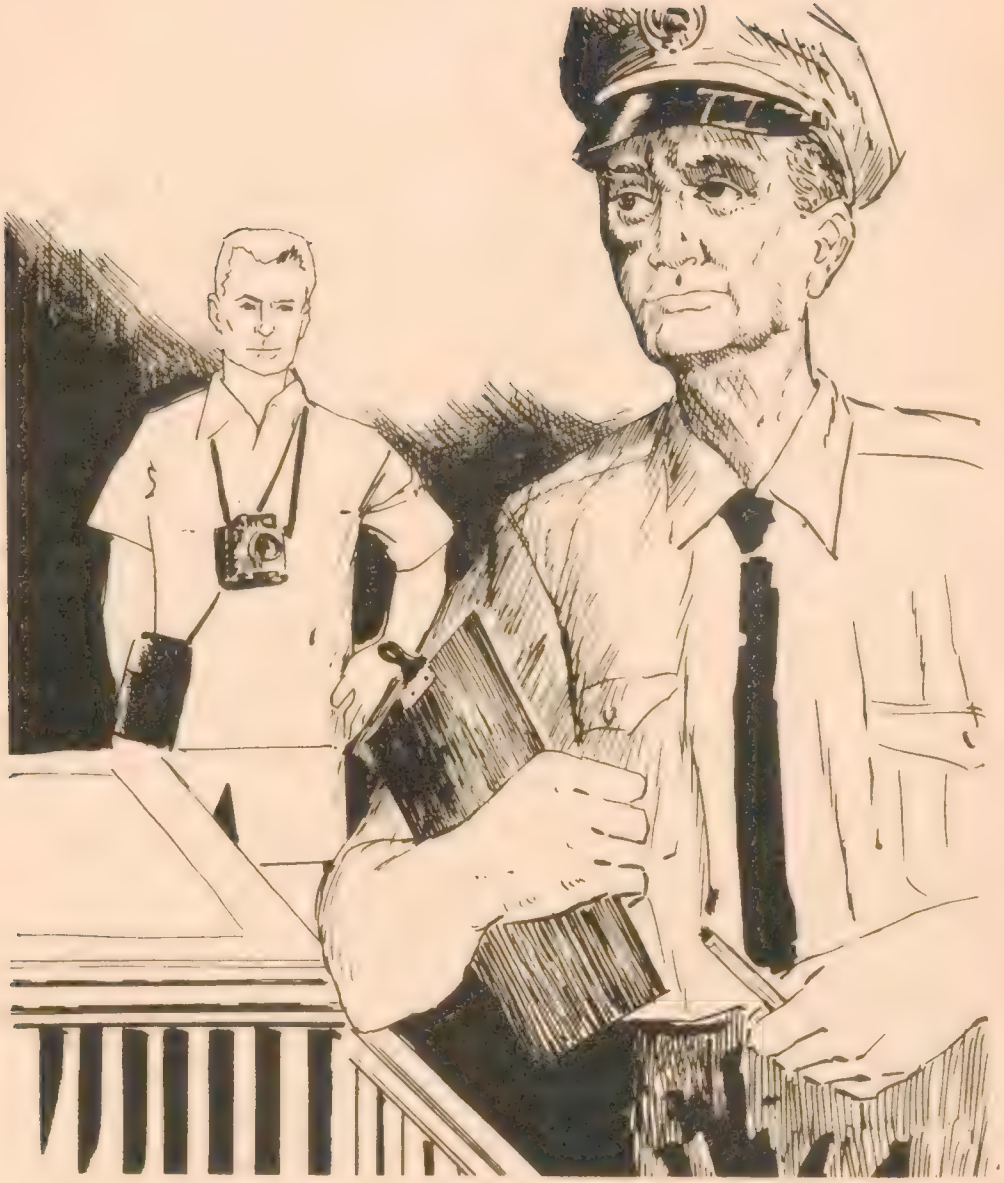
THE POLYCHROME vase looked rather the worse for wear. Its glaze had grown dull. Its colors were noticeably faded, and at one place on its lip, a half-inch chip of pottery was missing.

Yet when Hugh Overton saw it through the glass of the National Museum display case, he knew at once that he had to have it. Or one like it. For the Mochica vase was more than a thousand years old, and Hugh Overton burned to add it to his world famous collection of Peruvian antiquities.

Overton was tall, just going gray, with the air of energetic authority so frequently acquired by men of great wealth. He spoke in very acceptable Spanish to the man beside him, "Magnificent, Professor! It must be new? I have never seen it listed nor illustrated. Not even in the San Marcos registry of antiquities."

The professor smiled. "It has not been listed yet, my friend," he said. "I found it myself on a dig only two months ago, and it has but recently got its carbon 14 dating."

"How old?" asked Overton



eagerly. "Mochica beyond any question. But what period?"

"800 A.D. Or close enough to make no difference."

"Where did you find it?"

"In the Chivú Valley."

"Near Huaca del Sol? The temple ruins?"

The professor looked at his guest with respect. "Yes," he said. "Exactly. You know of Huaca del Sol?"

Overton laughed. "I certainly do! It's responsible, in a way, for my interest in Peruvian cultures. I went there once. I saw the ruins. And they're mind-boggling! The remains of a structure built by a primitive people centuries ago who calmly used 130,000,000 sun-dried adobe bricks to do the job! Imagine! 130,000,000! And that's where this vase came from?"

The Professor nodded. He was a hook-nosed slender man, below middle height, with a swarthy skin and night-black eyes. His expression was impassive, inscrutable almost. He looked more Indian than Spanish, for his ancestral Inca strain had sturdily withstood the unwelvome infusion of Conquistador blood Pizarro had brought to Peru.

For a moment they stood silently together, the California collector and the Peruvian savant, admiring the ancient vase which represented a Mochica warrior with broad, flat face and swathed head, mounted upon a stylized llama.

At length, in a reverent tone, Overton murmured, "I would give a year's income for it, Professor! No possible chance, I suppose?"

"None," said the Professor. "You know that very well. Antiquities are now the property of the state and, by law, must remain here in Peru. Remember, they are our only links to our early history. With us, archeology *is* our history."

"Sure, sure," said Overton impatiently. "But this piece . . . A warrior riding a llama! It gives the lie to all the scholars who have claimed that the llama was never ridden by the Mochicas, was merely a beast of burden!"

The Professor's lips quirked in what for him was an animated expression. "True. The piece *is* confirmation that the Mochicas rode their llamas, at least sometimes." He turned his head and regarded Overton with a rallying glint in his black eyes. "Can you see any other cause for scholars to rejoice in this humble vase I have found?"

Overton didn't pause for a second. "Sure," he said, "the warrior riding the llama has his left foot missing. How about that?"

"What about it?" The professor was smiling with pleasure, as though at the acuity of one of his college students.

"What about it? He's an amputee, that's what about it! That's a surgical stump if I ever saw one. So this vase settles something else that's kept us all in an unroar for years, doesn't it? That the Mochicas

had doctors—surgeons! Before the Incas came along. And of considerable skill, judging by the figure on this vase."

The Professor nodded his approbation. "If only my own poor people knew as much about our history as you do!" he murmured. Then, fiercely, he added, "Given the time and the grace of God, Senor, I, Professor Felipe de la Vega, holder of the chair of Inca studies at San Marcos University, and government consultant on preservation of Peruvian antiquities, will be able, in my lifetime, to teach many of my country's youngsters to appreciate their heritage!"

Overton was touched by the Professor's sincerity. "I'm sure you'll do a great job of it, too," he said. "But about this vase, now. I can't buy it from the Museum? I could offer a substantial sum—a very substantial sum."

"Please," protested de la Vega. "You know it is impossible. And why."

Overton said plaintively, "Isn't there even a black market any more?"

De la Vega shrugged. "We've done our best to stamp it out, and the smuggling that invariably accompanies it."

Overton clicked his tongue and stared hungrily at the vase. He had arrived in Lima

by Pan-Am Clipper the day before. After establishing himself comfortably at the Lima Country Club, five miles out of town, he had immediately telephoned Professor de la Vega at San Marcos University as prearranged by letter.

Writing a popular history of pre-Inca civilizations in Peru and knowing the Professor's reputation, Overton had begged the privilege of consulting him on a troublesome point in his forthcoming book. Professor de la Vega had courteously agreed.

Thus, over a superb dinner at the Lima Country Club the night before, and over cigars and brandy afterward, the two men had spent several pleasant hours discussing Overton's problem: The likely origin of

the Cat-God—a ferocious-looking beast whose likeness appeared, time after time, on the pottery, stonework and weaving of the Chavin people who had inhabited Peru's northern coastal desert between 1200 and 400 B.C.

When they parted, the Professor offered to give Overton a guided tour the following day of the National Museum of Archeology. That's where the Professor's Mochica vase was now being admired—and coveted—by Overton.

Overton said, "I haven't visited Peru in ten years. Surely this is not the only Mochica vase uncovered in all that time? I mean a vase similar to this one?"

"The only one I know of, with an amputee astride a llama, yes." Faintly but noticeably, the Professor underlined the word amputee as he spoke.

Overton looked at him shrewdly. "But not the only man on a llama? Is that what you mean, Professor?"

The Professor coughed and showed his discomfort. "Well. . ." he said hesitantly.

"Well what?" Overton pressed him.

The Professor was blunt. "Are you interested in seeing another example, Senor Overton, or in buying one for your collection?"

Overton spread his hands. "You say it's impossible to buy one. Very well. So the next best thing is seeing one, right? I'm interested, of course, in anything that can add verisimilitude to my book. Like this vase, which I hope you will allow me to photograph before we leave the Museum."

"Go ahead," said the Professor. "Do it now, if you like."

Overton took some color shots of the Mochica vase from various angles. While he was working, he said, "You do know of another example of Mochica work, showing a man on a llama?"

The Professor sighed. "I do, yes. One other."

"Aha!" exclaimed Overton triumphantly. "Where is it?"

"It belongs to a former pupil of mine."

"What's his name? Where can I find him?"

"Her. Not him. A young lady. She brought her piece of Mochica pottery to class one day to have me authenticate it for her."

"And was it authentic?" Overton asked.

"Beyond question. A genuine antiquity of great beauty. A jug, six inches high, showing a cowled Mochica warrior astride a llama, guiding the llama with a rope through the llama's ear."

Overton's voice held excite-

ment. "Why didn't she have to turn it over to the state?"

"Private ownership of antiquities is permitted to Peruvians, of course." The Professor paused. "As a matter of fact, I tried to buy the jug from her for the University's own collection. But without success. The young lady told me the jug had sentimental value for her. The gift of a dead fiancé, or something of the sort."

"And where would a dead fiancé pick up a treasure like that, for God's sake?" asked Overton impetuously.

The Professor shrugged. "Laborers on a dig sometimes hold out for themselves an occasional archeological treasure they uncover. Our antiquities are so very valuable, you must remember, and most of our people are so very poor." He spoke apologetically.

"Anyway," said Overton, "I'd love to see this girl's jug. Maybe she'd let me photograph it for my book. How can I get in touch with her? Do you remember her mane?"

"Ramón, I think," replied de la Vega. "I am not certain, however. And I never knew her address. So many students pass through my classes these days."

"Look," said Overton, "wouldn't you be able to find her in the University records? If I'm going to see her Mochica jug, it's got to be this afternoon, I guess. I'm taking a morning plane home."

"Very well," said the Professor. "Can you come back with me now to San Marcos?"

"You bet!" Overton could not hide his eagerness. He put away his camera.

THE UNIVERSITY record file revealed that Professor de la Vega's student had indeed been a Señorita Isabella Ramón, with an address in the Lima suburb of Miraflores.

Overton said, "I'll get out there right away!" Then he hesitated. "Do you suppose she'll see me? I'm a stranger, a North American one, at that."

"I'll give you a note to her," said the Professor. He wrote a few words on a card in a precise vertical script and handed the card to Overton.

"I'll take a cab," Overton said. He held out his hand. "Thanks for everything, Professor de la Vega," he said. "You've been very kind. I hope you'll allow me to return your courtesies very soon in California. I'll send you a presentation copy of my book when it's published, of course. And give you full credit for the Cat-God theory we discussed last night."

They parted with mutual expressions of esteem.

The address in Miraflores

proved to be a new apartment hosue twelve stories tall. Overton rang the bell of apartment eighteen and tapped his foot impatiently in the corridor until the door opened.

When it did, he could scarcely restrain a whistle. The young lady confronting him was strikingly handsome. Her dark eyes and fine-cut acquiline features were dramatically framed by cascades of burnished black hair. Her figure, only partially concealed by the white slacks and blouse she was wearing, was full and provocative. "Yes?" she asked Overton in an abrupt no-nonsense contralto.

"Miss Ramón?"

She nodded. "What do you want?"

Overton intriduced himself and handed her Professor de la Vega's card. When she had read it, she stepped back at once and invited Overton to enter with a sweeping graceful gesture of her hand.

"If you come from Professor de la Vega, you are more than welcome, Señor Overton." she said, seating herself on a brocaded sofa that was painfully threadbare. He sat down in a chair facing her. "The Professor's a darling, isn't he?" She gave him a curious look. "But why has he sent you to me?"

Overton said, "Señorita, I am writing a book on pre-Inca civilizations, and I plan to include in it photographs of typical Peruvian antiquities from which we have garnered our meager store of facts about your country's history. Professor de la Vega told me about your Mochica jug, and suggested that I might get your permission to photograph it for my book.

"My Mochica jug!" An expression of regret passed over Señorita Ramón's lovely face like a cloud momentarily obscuring the sun. "What a pity! I no longer have the jug, Señor Overton."

Overton schooled the disappointment from his voice and said, "May I ask what happened to it, Señorita?"

"I sold it," she replied simply.

"But I understood from Professor de la Vega that it had sentimental value for you? That you refused to sell it to San Marcos for that reason?"

"Yes, yes. I did refuse. My fiancé had given it to me, you see, before he died. But when I acquired a new fiancé . . ." She shrugged charmingly and gave him a deprecatory smile.

"The sentimental value of the jug diminished, eh? I can understand that."

She said defensively, "Its sale has given Raoul and me enough

money to marry on next month. Otherwise, we might have had to wait for years. I find it ironic, in a way, that my first fiancé made it possible for me to marry my second one. Don't you, Señor Overton?"

"Very ironic indeed," said Overton. Then, reflectively, "Once you decided to sell your jug, I'm surprised you didn't sell it to your old Professor. You knew he wanted it for the University."

"I did want to sell it to him," said Señorita Ramón. "My fiancé, however"—she dimpled—"the new one, that is, said he could get a far better price elsewhere."

"In the black market?"

She was slightly ashamed, yet defiant. "Thay offered us twice as much as Professor de la Vega!"

"I don't blame you, Señorita." Overton was silent for a moment. Then he said, "I won't hide from you that I am bitterly disappointed. After the Professor's glowing description of your jug, I was looking forward to including a photograph of it in my book. I'm sorry you sold the jug before I knew of its existence." He smiled. "I would have paid you twice as much as the black market."

Señorita Ramón crossed her legs elegantly and thought about that for a moment. At length she sighed with regret and said, "In that case, I, too, wish I had waited. But it's too late now, isn't it?"

She stood up, bringing Overton to his feet. Following her to the door, he waited until she opened it before putting to her, in a way he tried to make casual and almost indifferent, the all-important question. "I don't suppose the—ah—buyer of your jug would be willing to sell it to me, would he?"

She paused, slowly turned, closed the half-open door and leaned against it, regarding him with surprise. "I never thought of that," she said, her black brows knitted attractively. "It's a possibility, I suppose."

"A remote one, no doubt," Overton said, "yet perhaps worth a try. Can you give me the buyer's name?" He waited with held breath for her reply.

"Are you certain you care to try dealing with the black market?" she asked at length. "It is not quite"—she groped for a word—" respectable, you know."

He grinned disarmingly. "If it's respectable enough for you and Raoul, it's respectable enough for me," he said.

She laughed. "Try the Peruvian Arts Cruio Shop, Señor Overton. On calle d'Oro near the bull ring in town. Mind

you, they've probably already sold my little jug."

"Thank you," said Overton. "I shall soon find out." He took a ten thousand sol bill from his pocket and proffered it to her. "Will you and your new fiancé honor me by accepting this small token of my appreciation? Look upon it as a wedding gift from a grateful North American friend?"

She refused the money indignantly, yet forgave him for offering it, if her warm handshake and dazzling smile of farewell meant anything.

Half an hour later, Overton strode into the Peruvian Arts Curio Shop on Calle d'Oro. It was a low-ceiling commodious store, incredibly cluttered with the tourist souvenirs it offered for sale. Floors, walls, shelves, glass-topped cases, were crammed with them. Some of the items even hung from the ceiling of the shop on cords and swayed lightly in the draft set up by Overton's entrance. A sweet-toned silver bell, attached to the front door, pealed softly as he entered.

Three elderly lady tourists, easily identified as Bostonians by their accents, were haggling with an enormous fat man —evidently the proprietor —over the price of a Peruvian silver ashtray, decorated with the graceful head of an Inca priest. Overton inspected the llama-skin rugs, the vicuña overcoats, the silver trinkets in a corner display case, while he waited for the three ladies to conclude their purchase and leave.

At length the fat man, who spoke excellent English, agreed to a small discount on the ashtray if the señras would buy three of them instead of one. With triumphant twitterings, the ladies immediately agreed, paid for their bargain, and left the shop.

"May I see the proprietor?" Overton asked the fat man politely.

The fat man laughed, a high shrill laugh. "You are seeing him now, Señor. All of him! And there is plenty to see, is there not?"

Overton smiled a response. Then he said, "I'd like to buy something in the way of a vase or figurine. An old one, actually—an antiquity, I guess you'd call it."

The fat man waved a hand at the shelves that lined one wall of his shop. "Right there are Inca antiquities of every kind, sir," he said and began to enumerate them with gusto. "Dinner plates used by the ancient Incas. Aren't they lovely? Animal figurines, lamps, vases, surgical instruments of copper. And there's a very nice

souvenir for a youngster, sir, that warclub with the star-shaped head."

Overton pretended to study the array. "Are they all real?"

"Genuine antiquities, do you mean?" The fat man shook his head sady. "I regret I must say they are not genuine antiquities, Señor. They are only copies of genuine pieces. Very good copies, to be sure, but still copies. We are forbidden to sell genuine antiquities to tourists, you understand. Even if we could obtain any for sale. You cannot legally take any antiquities out of this country, either."

He paused. "But who, in North America, will know the difference, Señor? An Inca antiquity is an Inca antiquity there, is it not? Even though only a copy?" Insolence laced the fat man's words. Overton felt his anger rise.

"I think you misunderstood me," he said. "I'm not interested in Inca antiquities, either genuine or copies. I'm looking for something much older, something perhaps from the Mochica era."

Overton watched carefully for the proprietor's reaction. The fat man's eyes, however, were so deeply buried in their fleshy sockets that he could not read their expression.

"Mochica?" he murmured. "Yes, we have copies of Mochica work, too, sir. Over here." He began to lead the way across the wide shop to another array of shelves.

Overton said to his broad back, "Not copies, if you please. I am seeking genuine pieces."

The fat man stopped in his tracks but did not turn. "What kind of thing did you have in mind?" he asked evenly.

"Well," said Overton, taking

the plunge, "if I could find something combining both a man's figure and an animal's—a vase, a lamp or a jug, perhaps?"

This time there was no doubt about the fat man's reaction. He turned about very lightly for such an obese man, almost dancing with pleasure, and said, "I apologize, sir! You are no ordinary tourist, am I right? You speak with knowledge of our archeological treasures. Would you care to tell me your name? Or how you happened to come to me seeking genuine Mochica pieces?"

This, Overton rightly surmised, was a gambit aimed at securing some idea of his financial rating. He said, "I'll be frank with you. I'm a collector of pre-Columbian artifacts. From California. My name is Hugh Overton. And I'm here to see if you have any genuine antiquities that interest me."

The proprietor's heavy jowls swung ludicrously as he wagged his head in dutiful denial. Overton went on doggedly, "I happen to know that you occasionally have such pieces to sell to the right customers. Under the counter, of course."

The fat man stood motionless for what seemed a long time. Then he flapped his pudgy hands in a pushing gesture and said slowly, "You mean I deal on the black market in Peruvian antiquities, Señor? Is that what you mean?"

"You could put it that way."

The fat man looked shocked. "Tell me, Señor Overton, where did you dig up such an astounding piece of misinformation?"

"From a former customer of yours, that's where," Overton said bluntly, "a customer whose name escapes me for the moment. I can, however, describe for you a genuine Mochica piece which I very much hope you can find for me. I am extremely anxious to see it. And if it is all I hope it is, I shall be more than willing to buy it from you. At your price."

The fat man drew a deep breath. "That is a very generous offer," he said. "Please describe this piece, Señor Overton. Then I shall be better able to tell you whether I can find it for you or not."

"It is a Mochica jug. It represents a warrior mounted on a llama. The warrior is guiding the llama by a rope through his ear."

The silver bell attached to the shop door tinkled and a lone tourist entered. Overton swore under his breath. The fat man raised his voice and called loudly, "Luis, a customer! I am occupied." Then, to Overton, "Will you do me the kindness to step into my office, sir? Where

we can be more private?" He smiled conspiratorialy.

He followed the fat man through a door at the back of the shop, passing en route a younger edition of the fat man who was emerging to wait on the new customer.

"Your son?" asked Overton politely when they were alone in a stuffy cubbyhole of an office behind the salesroom.

"My brother. We look alike, do we not?"

"Very much so. There is a considerable difference in age, however, I would guess?"

"Quite right. I was born twenty years before Luis. And consequently, I have felt responsible for him—all his worthless life!"

While this small talk was going on, the fat man was twisting the dial of an old-fashioned box safe set in the corner of the office. The door yielded. He pulled it wide and groped inside with one hand.

When the pudgy hand emerged, it clasped in its sausage-like fingers a bundle of soft white material that looked like absorbent cotton to Overton. Slowly, with infinite delicacy, the fat hands placed the bundle on a table beside the safe and proceeded to strip off its cotton covering.

Overton gasped with pleasure.

"Is that something like you had in mind?" asked the fat man, rubbing his hands together.

Overton was too overcome by emotion for the moment to reply. All he could do was nod his head enthusiastically. His first glimpse of the pottery jug convinced him it was genuine Mochica. He had not spent thousands of hours studying Peruvian antiquities, and hundreds of thousands of dollars acquiring them for his collection, to be deceived, even by a superb fake.

The jug was a once-in-a-lifetime piece of collector's luck, like striking gold when you are digging for coal. Beyond all doubt, this was the piece whose genuineness had been unquestioningly vouched for by no less an authority than Professor Felipe de la Veta.

Overton raised his eyes to the fat man and asked simply, "How much?"

With equal directness, the proprietor answered, "A quarter of a million sols. And a bargain at that price!"

Overton didn't even bother to work out the sum in dollars. "Wrap it up," he said, "I'll take it." He reached for the thick pad of travelers checks in his hip pocket.

The fat man said, "Cash, if you please."

"Cash? Won't you accept travelers checks?"

"I'm sorry. You can understand that so large a sum deposited in our bank in travelers checks, all signed by you, might cause questions to be asked. My entire inventory is not worth that much money!" The fat man grinned. "I must avoid any appearance of illegality, you understand."

"All right," Overton said with characteristic energy, "the banks are still open. I'll exchange travelers checks for sols and return."

"Better yet, sir. Get your sols at a foreign exchange dealer. There are at least four booths within two blocks of here. They are used to dealing in foreign currencies, even large amounts."

Within the promised time, Overton was back. He counted out a stack of five and ten thousand sol notes on the fat man's office table. "A quarter of a million," he said when he had finished. "Right?"

The fat man carefully recounted the money. "Correct," he said and straightened. "Now we must address the really difficult part of our transaction, Señor. How to smuggle your jug out of Peru."

AT A QUARTER to ten the following morning, Overton slid his suitcase onto the counter of the Customs shed at the airport and handed his passport to the uniformed Customs inspector.

The inspector wished him good morning in English after a glance at the American passport. Then he said politely, "Will you open, please?"

Overton complied. His hands, to his satisfaction, were perfectly steady as he undid the suitcase clasps. His expression gave no hint of the excitement bottled up inside him. He felt rather like a boy who has taken a dare from his companions and is embarking on a dangerous but insidiously thrilling escapade. He opened his bag with apparent nonchalance.

The Customs inspector explored with careful hands the contents of the case while Overton watched him casually. Satisfied that no suspicious packages lurked out of sight among Overton's possessions, the inspector turned his attention to the package that lay in plain sight on top of them.

It was irregular in shape, about the size of a shoe box. And it was wrapped in a diagonally-striped paper on which the name Peruvian Arts Curio Shop, in square squat letters, formed every other stripe. The inspector said, "Curios, Señor?"

"Souvenirs," said Overton. "Want to look at them?"

"Please." The Customs man loosened the transparent tape that secured the wrapping and opened the package without removing it from Overton's suitcase. He exposed to a view a half dozen glassine envelopes containing money clips and bottle openers of Peruvian silver; a pair of very small bedroom slippers lined with llama wool; and a ten-inch papier maché statuette of an Inca priest, so skillfully antiqued that its crevices seemed still to hold the dust of centuries.

The Customs inspector nodded his head and smiled. "Yes," he said, "okay." He lifted the statuette to tuck the smaller items under it before rewrapping the package. Overton could have shouted his relief.

Suddenly the inspector paused, the statuette in his hand, and seemed to commune silently with himself for a moment. He didn't look at Overton, nor, so far as Overton could tell, was he looking at the statuette. Finally he dropped the statuette back in the suitcase, closed the bag and picked up Overton's passport in his other hand. He lifted the bag down from the counter and said, "Would you mind coming with me for a moment, Señor?"

Overton found himself short of breath all at once and perspiring lightly, although the Customs shed was cold. He lifted the leaf in the Customs counter, passed through, and followed the inspector with his suitcase into an exclosed office at the rear of the Customs shed.

The inspector proceded him into this office, blocking his view momentarily, so Overton's surprise was all the greater when he saw who was sitting at the desk in a corner of the office.

"Professor!" he exclaimed, the one word a mixture of astonishment and pleasure.

Professor Felipe de la Vega looked up from the Customs declarations he was perusing and recognized Overton at once. "Señor Overton!" he said, jumping up from his chair and advancing to shake hands cordially. "How nice to see you again before you leave us! How did you know I was here?"

"I didn't," Overton said blankly. "Why are you here, Professor?"

The small man cocked his head. "It's my job," he explained. "I'm here four days a week."

"But you're a university professor, an archelogist!" Overton said. His face mirrored his confusion.

The Professor laughed. "Also a glorified Customs inspector on the days I have no classes at

San Marcos," he explained. "Don't you remember? I told you I was a government consultant for the preservation of Peruvian antiquities? This is it. Moonlighting, my friend. Isn't that what you call it? Humiliating for a man of scholarly bent, perhaps, yet in my case, alas, quite necessary."

Then, with an almost visible start, the Professor seemed to become aware for the first time that Overton's visit to his office might have other than social implications. He turned to the Customs inspector who, with Overton's suitcase in hand, had stood respectfully aside during the exchange between the two men, and barked at him. "This man is my friend, José! What's your concern with him?"

José spoke up boldly, although flushing in embarrassment at the Professor's hectoring manner. "I wanted you to have a look at his curios," he said, "the souvenirs he is taking home."

"What about them?" The professor was angry. "You surely don't—where are they?"

"Here," said the Customs inspector. He placed Overton's bag on the floor, threw back the lid and pointed to the souvenirs, now lying scattered in disarray on top of Overton's clothing.

Professor de la Vega looked at them and snorted. "Are you mad, inspector? This is the regular tourist junk!" He smiled apologetically at Overton. "Will you forgive José, Señor Overton? He is inclined sometimes, to be over-zealous in his duties."

"Sure," said Overton, feeling vast relief. "It's all right. I understand. Better to be safe than sorry." He felt like a fool. "I'm just taking back a few souvenirs for my friends."

José got a stubborn look on his face. "Only one of his souvenirs disturbed me," he said to the Professor.

"Which one?" the Professor snapped.

"The statuette."

"Why?"

"It feels too heavy for a figurine of papier maché."

The Professor approached Overton's bag. "Papier maché can be quite heavy," he pontificated, "if the paper pulp is mixed with enough clay and glue." He stooped over, pocked up Overton's statuette, and abruptly fell silent.

José, sensing victory, turned an accusing eye on Overton. The Professor straightened slowly and stood with his back to Overton, weighing the statuette in his hand. After a silent interval, during which Overton's shortness of breath reasserted itself, de la Vega

took a long slim paper knife from the drawer of his desk, inserted its sharp point in the almost invisible crack where the two halves of the statuette mold were joined. He worked the knife point back and forth until he forced the two halves of the figurine apart.

The hollow center of the figurine should have contained nothing but trapped air. Instead it contained a bundle of soft absorbent cotton which had filled the hollow souvenir to capacity.

The Professor sent Overton a surprised look. "Santa Maria!" he muttered, almost to himself. He removed the cotton slowly from Overton's Mochica jug. Then he said in a pained voice, "José, I apologize! You should be the consultant here, not I. You may go back now to your post. I'll take care of this smuggler now."

José, his face now mantled in smiles, put Overton's passport on the Professor's desk and left without another glance at Overton.

The Professor said, "You lied to me, Señor Overton. This is the jug that belonged to Señorita Ramón. You assured me that you wanted only to photograph it for your book. Instead, you bought it." His voice was freighted with contempt. "Did you dazzle Señorita Ramon with your great wealth? Tempt her beyond her powers of resistance? I thought better of her than that! She seemed to me a dedicated student of Peruvian history, not a money-hungry traitor to her country's heritage!" The little man gulped down his indignation, then went on shrilly, "You broke the law, and so did she. She'll have to suffer for it, believe me, señor."

Despite himself, Overton sprang to Isabella Ramón's defense. "She didn't sell me the damned jug!" he said. "She'd already sold it on the black market, so she could get married on the money."

"So?" said the Professor, more calmly. He looked at the wrapping paper still in Overton's suitcase and said, "The Peruvian Arts Curio Shop. How interesting. I presume they must be responsible for this childish effort to smuggle the jug through Customs?"

Overton didn't see much sense in answering that. He said irritably, "Oh, come on, Professor, what's so terrible about what I've done? I'm a collector. I add to my collection when and as I can. Every collector does. You know that. So you've caught me at it this time. Okay. There's still no reason for you to take this holier-than-thou attitude and

make a big production out of the thing.

"It hasn't changed anything between us, really. You're still a scholar of Peruvian history and archeology. So am I. We both still admire your country and the marvelous things it has produced in the past. I'm still very grateful to you for your help on my new book. So let me pay my fine, or whatever, and get out of here, for God's sake, because my plane goes in three minutes!"

Overton forebore to look at his Mochica jug on the Professor's desk. He felt heartsick enough.

"There is no fine," muttered the Professor at last. "A fine would be no punishment for you!"

Overton said, "There's no penalty for attempted smuggling?" He couldn't believe it.

"Oh, yes, there's a penalty. Confiscation." The Professor ran a gentle finger over the figure of the llama on the pottery jug. Then he raised his eyes—black and expressionless—to Overton. "And that is a heavy punishment for you, isn't it? To lose this Mochica jug. That, and the knowledge that you will never again be permitted to visit Peru, for any reason." He glanced at his watch, then pointed to Overton's suitcase on the floor. "You still have time to catch your plane," he said, "if you hurry."

LATER, Professor de la Vega entered the Peruvian Arts Curio Shop and went directly to the office at the rear. Here he found the fat proprietor sitting contemplatively at the small table near the safe, drinking a cup of black coffee and staring at nothing. The coffee pot still steamed gently on a hot plate beside the safe.

The fat man looked up when the Professor plunked the Mochica jug down on the table beside his coffee cup. The Professor said, "You have been accused of illegal black market dealing in Peruvian antiquities, Pequeño! A very serious charge indeed. This jug was confiscated by Customs today from a North American named Overton. What do you have to say to that?"

"Only that I'm surprised you found it," answered the fat man. "I have never done a better job of preparing a foolproof smuggling receptacle. How I labored over it! Someday I will fool you."

The Professor laughed. "Let us hope not," he said. "How much did you gouge out of Señor Overton?"

"A quarter of a million. Not bad, I thought. A large enough

sum to yield us a handsome profit, yet not large enough to give your collector pause."

"Excellent. And have you sent Señorita Ramón her share?"

"Of course. She must have been very good with this one. He wouldn't even tell me her name when I asked him who had sent him to me."

The Professor poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down in a chair facing the fat man. He jerked a thumb at the Mochica jug. "Keep that in your safe for me over the weekend, will you? I'll slip it back into the University's collection on Monday after my morning class. Incidentally, that German archeologist I mentioned to you, Herr Obermeyer, has written that he will be in Lima next month to consult me on the subject of Inca architecture."

"Is he rich, too?" the fat man asked.

The Professor smiled complacently. "And a noted collector of pre-Columbian artifacts."

"God is indeed good."

"Yes." The professor sipped his coffee. After a moment, he said curiously, "Do you never experience any feeling of guilt about what we're doing, Pequeño?"

"I do not!" said the fat man emphatically.

"Nor do I," said the Professor, "because they bring on their own misfortunes, these fellows, do they not? By a common failing. No matter how brilliant, rich or famous they are, they always seem to lack one basic characteristic."

"What characteristic is that?"

Professor Felipe de la Vega smiled. "A proper respect for the Customs of our country."

Next Month's Dual Headlines:

•

DEATH CALLS THE PLAYS by BRETT HALLIDAY

The New Mike Shayne Short Novel

•

CRAZY JOE GALLO by DAVID MAZROFF

The New Amazing True Crime Mafia Masterpiece

The Old Home Place

by ROBERT CHESMORE

I DIDN'T COME to visit my sister that spring intending to team up with Tiny Klotz and heist—ugly word, that—a couple hundred grand from her house. I was fond of Melissa and wouldn't dream of stealing from *her*. At least not that much.

It was, however, mainly a shortage of funds that brought me back to what I like to think of as the old home place, though it isn't particularly old

His past wouldn't stand up to an investigation, but his future was looking brighter every day. Especially when the District Attorney brought home the loot. It was a great place to rob. Unfortunately, he lived there . . .

or mellow. It's just a good place to come back to—a fifteen room mansion resting on two acres of manicured greenery that slopes gently down in back to a private beach and boat dock on the lake. My old man had been a millionaire.

As soon as I arrived I knew something was wrong with Melissa. When I met her new husband, George Crane, I knew what it was.

Melissa was thirty, a year older than me. Also she's taller, but I'm pretty short. She was an attractive brunette—and rich. Everybody liked her, and she should have been able to latch onto somebody more compatible than George Crane. Somebody, for instance, who would have shared her enthusiasm for the outdoors, boating, fishing, that sort of thing.

George was up to his ears in politics and had little time for Melissa or her hobbies. He was a stocky, hairy chested, aggressive character, whom I would have disliked even if he hadn't been the local district attorney.

During my stay he only came home to dinner a few times. He had a phony routine: After buttering up Melissa he would turn to me and, with sincere interest oozing from every pore of his swarthy face, would ask me nosy questions about my affairs, which I would answer briefly with more or less whatever came into my head. He was a sharpie, though, and probably figured me for what I was—a gambler by trade.

After dinner he would give Melissa a hasty peck on the lips and be off again to storm the walls.

One morning, as Melissa and I dawdled over a late breakfast, I said, "The way George works at his job, this ought to be, crimewise, the cleanest city in the U.S. of A."

Since it was actually one of the dirtiest, this was striking a low blow, but I did that to Melissa sometimes, maybe because when our old man died she got most of the loot. He and I had never hit it off too well, but Melissa and he were real buddies. Sports and the outdoor jazz was their bag. Not mine.

When she merely looked at me, sad eyed and silent, I said with contrition, "Well, one man can't do it all."

"He hopes to be Governor some day," she said.

"Hey, you would make a great first lady, sis."

"I'd hate it. Things would be even worse. We never do anything together as it is. And I'm sick of phone calls from mysterious people who won't leave their names and of reporters coming around. I guess you've been reading the papers."

"Not much," I said.

"Anyway, I don't want to move out of this house," she said.

I didn't want her to either. I have my sentimental side.

"If I couldn't get out on the lake," she said, "I think I would go batty. Say, Morris, how about going for a sail with me today?"

"I'd like to," I lied, "but I've got this date."

Actually, I was going out to scout the local action, though I didn't expect to play. Everybody in this town knew me too well.

As I went out the door Melissa said, smiling, "Don't take any phony money."

It was a topical joke. Somebody had been papering the town with queer.

I didn't gamble that afternoon, but two days later there began to fall into place events which led up to Tiny Klotz and I making that single throw of the dice for the big pot.

Melissa and I were in George's study that Friday afternoon—three days before I planned to leave—when George came home early, carrying the big, obviously new, traveling bag. Melissa glanced at it curiously, but said nothing. George's training, no doubt.

He seemed momentarily disconcerted at finding us in the study, but casually tossed the bag onto his desk and gave Melissa a kiss, which she accepted passively—maybe stoically is the word.

"I've got a few things to put away," he said, "if you'll excuse me. Say, how about you two fixing us all a drink? I'll be out in about ten minutes."

He escorted us to the door and closed it after us. We were halfway to the bar when Melissa said, "Oh, I forgot to tell him he was to return Judge Troop's call immediately."

She retraced her steps and opened the study door. Her mouth dropped open and she swayed slightly, then she went in and closed the door behind her.

My curiosity aroused by the shocked expression on her face, I executed a silent ballet step down the hall to the hearing register where long ago, after similar choreography, I had learned Santa Claus was really my old man. A kid doesn't forget such things.

Melissa's voice: *My God, there must be a hundred thousand dollars . . . .*

George interrupted, growling something unintelligible.

Just then, the maid, bless her, made ice-cube noises at the bar, and George raised his voice. "It will only be here over the week end. Just keep your mouth closed."

I heard the door of dad's old wall safe click shut. Not wanting to press my luck I tiptoed back up the hall and into the bar, where I ousted the maid and began fixing our drinks.

A hundred grand!

Maybe more. Sis was just guessing, and he'd needed a large bag to carry it in.

His bringing it home pointed to a pay-off or bribe of some kind, and its being such a huge amount probably meant some pretty big names were involved.

Surely there was something for me here.

As I was mixing the drinks and pondering the mechanics of blackmail, an alternative popped into my head. Why not just take the money—all of it?

The operation I had in mind was so far out of my line that it scared me at first, but the wheels kept turning and soon it all began to look easy. The first step was to talk Tiny Klotz into it. Stupid though he was, he should be able to handle his end of the thing. Anyhow I didn't know anybody else—and I could trust him.

I converted all the drinks to doubles. Melissa probably needed one; mine would be a toast to my rosy future; and why slight George?

A WAREHOUSE leaned against Tiny's hotel as though trying to topple it into the adjacent weed grown alley. I parked on the street and locked my car.

I asked the old ex-con at the desk where Tiny was currently working.

"He ain't. He's on vacation. He'll either be out on the lake fishing or in his room. Upstairs. 207."

I went on up.

Tiny and I had been in the service together in Saigon. Since we were both active in the black market, we had gotten together frequently in a business way.

His being a bartender at the officers' mess had given me an idea. With an inside man like that, it should be possible to relieve the brass of some of their stores of booze and cigarettes—very marketable items.

Tiny was pretty square, but he'd done his time with the grunts in the field and didn't consider knocking over a plush

officers' club was the same as stealing.

It was a fiasco. I cussed Tiny out pretty badly afterward, though it hadn't been his fault. I had to relieve my frustration some way, and I'd found I could insult Tiny and get away with it, though he could have broken a runt like me into little pieces.

Shortly after we got out of the service he looked me up at Melissa's, and I found him a job tending bar. He was good, and so big he could bounce a trouble maker gently, even, you could believe, with compassion.

He'd stayed on in our town, mostly, I think, because of the good hunting and fishing nearby. He was as much of an outdoor nut as Melissa.

I knocked on Tiny's door and heard the squeak of bedsprings as he hoisted his mighty carcass out of the sack. The din of a western shoot-em-up stopped abruptly as he turned off the T.V.

The door opened and his big moon face beamed down at me.

"Hiya, Morris. Come on in. I wasn't doing anything just watching T.V."

He opened a couple of beers and sat down on the bed while I took the chair.

"I'm on vacation," he said. "Been really living it up. Fishing mostly and—hey, Morris, you remember that G.I. piece I sorta borrowed in Nam? Bagged two squirrels with it yesterday."

The gods were smiling. We needed that gun.

I said, "I guess it's been a drag for an outdoor guy like you, tending bar all these years."

"Yeah. I'd like to be out building houses and stuff. When I was just a kid I built a house from scratch for Ma and me back in Arkansas. And just once I'd like to be my own boss, too. If I had a stake I'd start me a construction business."

That would be something to see: Tiny running a business.

"I'd build myself a little house down by the lake," he added, then, "Aw heck, I'm just daydreaming. I'll be lucky if I save up enough for a new fishing boat."

Obviously it was time to start my pitch. I eased into it gradually in order to not scare him off. Soon I could see in his eyes the spark of interest igniting back there in that dim brain.

"I figured all along you didn't come up here just to visit," he said.

"The stuff is just sitting there waiting for us."

"Like the booze and cigarettes in the officers' club?"

"We were just a couple of green kids," I said. "Anyway

we got away free. You're not holding it against me because I ran off in the truck?"

"No. Course not."

"Look, this time *I'm* the inside man. Nobody else will be around except my sister and a guy whose action is all in his mouth."

"Jeez. Your sister? The one I met that time right after we got out of the army?"

I nodded.

"A very nice lady."

"True. And we'll be doing her a favor getting a wad of crooked pay-off money out of her house."

I outlined my plan of action. Tiny scratched his head. "You think we're smart enough to pull it off?" Tiny was getting insufferable. Didn't he know I had brains enough for both of us?

"There's nothing to it," I said. "If everything is okay I give you the signal. You come in with the unloaded revolver and make George open the safe. Then you take off with the loot and we split it down the middle Sunday."

"How about 60-40? I'm doing the hard part."

"Okay," I'd con back the difference some way.

The next day, Saturday, I picked up a cloth bag with a wide mouth and a puckering string, and one of those ski caps that pull down over the face. Also a couple of penlights.

Early in the afternoon we drove out past Melissa's. I was wearing dark shades and one of Tiny's old fishing hats and was driving. We moved slowly past the house so he could have a good look at the little wooded cul-de-sac where he would park tonight and at the terrain he would cross in getting to the patio door.

The wealthy neighborhood stoned him. "I'd forgot your sister's house was so big. It's a goddam mansion, and look at that view of the lake."

"Never mind the lake. You're not coming by boat."

Back in his room we worked out the details. I especially

warned him to ignore anything George said.

"He won't panic. He'll stall and bluff. He knows every trick in the book; that's his business. Just scare hell out of him and make him open that safe."

JUDGE AND MRS. Throop came to dinner that evening. That meant two more bodies for Tiny to keep corralled, but their presence made it doubly certain that George would be home to open the safe. The Judge was a rabbity, middle-aged guy and he had a little, round dumpling of a wife. They would be no problem.

Throughout dinner, Judge Throop and George talked politics while the two women gossiped together. The two factions interrelated only once, as I recall, when the dumpling asked George when the counterfeiters were going to be apprehended.

"Treasury's on it," he said, dismissing both her and the subject with a wave of his hand.

After dinner I went down to the family room and turned on the T.V. I was getting jittery and had some time to kill. Almost immediately I caught a flash of headlights among the trees where Tiny was to park.

I swore. If Tiny couldn't even tell time, what else might he do wrong tonight? Then I saw that it was a suburban patrol car, backing now to reenter the street. Why the hell didn't the fuzz stay in the ghetto where the crime was? Still, it was a break. In making their rounds they weren't likely to come back here soon.

Ten minutes before Tiny was to arrive, I unlatched the patio door. If the maid swore she had checked it I would take the blame. I had stepped out for a breath of air and forgotten to lock it when I came back in.

I switched off the T.V. and lights and went up to my room. Everything looked good. The four of them were together in the living room, which was where we wanted them, and the maid had gone home.

As I watched from my window, the headlamps of a car swung smoothly off the street and blacked out. Then I heard Tiny quietly maneuvering into position for the quick getaway.

Good show, Tiny.

We exchanged signals with our pen lights, then I went down to the bar, where I noisily mixed myself a Scotch and soda to advertise my location. I also belted down a good slug from the bottle to quiet the trembling in my hands.

I made my casual entrance into the living room. Tiny was already there, covering everybody with the big service re-

volver and looming huge and menacing with the ski cap drawn down over his face like an executioner's hood.

He waved me over to join the group. They were all terrified except George, who was playing it very cool. I knew he was thinking all the time, and it worried me.

After making us drop watches, jewelry, and money on the coffee table, Tiny swept the loot into his bag. Then, according to plan, his eyes roamed to the door of the study.

"What's in there?" He had sense enough, I noted, to disguise his voice slightly. Melissa had heard it before.

"Law books, papers," George said. "Nothing for you, but feel free to look. You've got the gun."

For a moment Tiny seemed to ponder this, then he herded us all into the study, where he performed admirably. After much opening of drawers and scattering of papers he looked behind the pictures on the wall and "discovered" the safe.

As was predictable, George at first denied having the combination, but his attempts to stall and evade ended quickly when Tiny shoved him toward the safe and pressed the muzzle of the revolver to the back of his head.

George opened the safe, then, to my amazement, began to chuckle. Turning toward Tiny, who had stepped back a pace, and with the smug grin of someone about to reveal a mammoth hoax, he said airily, "Ever see a couple hundred grand in one place, young man?"

Now what?

I could imagine the confusion in Tiny's brain, but the gun didn't waver as he kept the two of us covered, not bothering much about the others. Mrs. Throop had fainted to the floor, and the Judge and Melissa were bent over her, murmuring words of comfort and slapping her face.

George pulled a bundle of new twenties from the safe and tossed it carelessly to Tiny. "Take a look at those bills, big fellow," he said. "Take a *good* look."

Tiny obediently studied the bills, riffling them with his thumb.

"It's pretty good counterfeit," George said, "but they don't feel right, do they? Kind of slick, oily. And look at that sloppy engraving."

As one expert to another he called Tiny's attention to the various defects. At this stage he couldn't have had much confidence in the success of his ridiculous ploy, but he was giving it a good try, and scaring

hell out of me. I knew Tiny, or thought I did.

As Tiny continued to stand there, managing to appear stupid even with his face covered by the mask, I could see George beginning to get his number. In his most sonorous courtroom voice George said, "This money is *evidence* and of vital importance to the United States Treasury Department. They're guarding the house at this moment." There followed a graphic description of the efficiency of the Secret Service and of the penalties appropriate to Tiny's crime, assuming he still meant to go through with it.

I could see Tiny's eyes—big question marks darting about the eye holes of the mask. They came to an idiotic focus on my face.

Don't look at me, dummy, I prayed.

At last, to my great relief, he said, "Fill the bag," but his voice lacked the edge of his previous commands, and George began obeying at such a leisurely pace that I moved in to help, pretending nervousness about the gun, though it was fear of Tiny getting brainwashed that was giving me the shakes. When all the money was in the bag I even pulled the drawstring for Tiny.

Then, so help me God, Tiny just stood there scratching the top of his head through the ski cap.

George hadn't stopped talking. "The stuff is too hot to push," he said, "though that's beside the point because you're going to be nailed as soon as you leave the house."

Then, when I thought all was lost, Tiny seized the bag, bolted to the door, and vanished.

George exploded. Cursing, his face contorted with fury, he lunged toward the door, but I grabbed him around the waist.

"Don't be a fool." I yelled. "The man's got a gun!"

He shook me off and started running again.

"I'll call the police," I said.

"No," he shouted back, "nobody call the police."

I caught up with him on the patio, where he was firing a small automatic at Tiny's car as it bounced into the street. The car roared off into the night.

George got a flashlight and we poked around out there where the car had been. George hoped, I suppose, that Tiny had dropped the bag after all. He hadn't.

I went to bed with a bottle of Scotch to help me unwind and drifted off to sleep on a sea of crinkly green. Tiny and I had done it—actually pulled it off!

I woke up, hungover and pessimistic, sure that something

was wrong. The cops had stopped Tiny or some hireling of George's political faction had gotten to him. Maybe the money *was* counterfeit. Maybe D.A.s did bring home evidence for safekeeping. What the hell did I know about it?

Nuts. George hadn't even fooled Tiny with that one, though I would guess it had been a near thing.

Downstairs, Melissa fixed me a bloody-mary, served it, and sat down with me. She was calm and relaxed, as though nothing had happened the night before.

I expressed sympathy over George's loss of the evidence in the counterfeiting case and said that, under the circumstances, I guessed I would leave this morning and get out of their way, unless the police would be wanting to question me.

"They won't. George said the people in his office would handle the investigation. It all seems to be very hush-hush. You know, of course, that the money wasn't counterfeit."

"Really?" I said, affecting a startled look of concern.

"Oh come on, Morris." She gave me a mocking smile, then reached over and tousled my hair the way she used to do when we were kids. "I'm going to miss you when you're gone, as always. And don't worry about the money. It wasn't mine."

"That's good," I mumbled, somewhat confused by her attitude of unconcern.

"*Isn't* it. Say, before you go I just have to tell you what I'm going to do about the lake front. I've been planning it for ages, but now I'm really going to do it."

Her face lit up as she told me about the prospective pool, the boathouse, and the dock. I'd heard it all before, and every muscle in my body was aching to take me to that money in Tiny's hotel.

At the end of her recital she added irrelevantly, "You'ld never guess whom I've been thinking of today."

"No. Who?"

"Tiny. Your army buddy. What was his name? Botts? Butts?"

A prickle of apprehension ran up my spine. "Tiny Klotz," I said warily.

"He looked you up here, you know, that time, and he came around again, looking for you, about a year later."

"I didn't know that."

"You weren't here. Anyway, we had a delightful chat. Ironically what reminded me of Tiny was that burglar last night —his huge size and sort of the way he carried himself."

Forcing a chuckle, I said,

"Golly, I'd better see if Tiny has an alibi for last night."

"Silly," she said. "Imagine that sweet, gentle man pointing a gun at anybody."

We had a good laugh over that, then I packed, and Melissa followed me out to the car and kissed me goodbye.

I FOUND TINY sitting on his bed, fooling with some fishing gear. He didn't look up.

"Hey, you were great, Tiny —just great, but you shoudln't leave your door open like that." I reached back and turned the catch.

"It don't matter," he said.

I found myself turning cold all over. "What's that supposed to mean?" I said.

"I should have left without the bag; then maybe I wouldn't have been shot at."

"Were you hit?" Maybe that was it. Maybe the poor clown stopped a bullet and thought he was dying.

"Naw, I didn't get hit, but I sure could have real easy."

I flung open the door to his closet. Old clothes. Junk. Nothing.

"Tiny," I helled, "Where in hell is the money?"

"I got rid of it in the middle of the lake."

I called him every obscene thing I could think of. When I had exhausted myself and stopped he said, "Those Government men had the house covered all right. They picked me up a block down the street. I shook them on the freeway, but by then I'd had a bellyfull. I wasn't about to get shot at any more over a bag of hot queer. I went straight to the lake and put rocks in the bag and sunk it." He scratched his head. "I don't rightly know why I went to so much trouble. Guess I just thought I'd best hide it real good."

I kicked one of Tiny's bait cans across the floor and began to get myself pulled together.

"Too bad you did that, Tiny. The money wasn't queer."

He rolled his dumb puppy eyes up at me. "It had to be. It felt too slick, kind of oily, and the engraving. . . . ."

"I know, was sloppy. I warned you not to listen to anything George said."

"Yeah, I guess you did, Morris."

"And you couldn't have shaken anybody off your tail in that old clunker you drive. Nobody was following you. George preconditioned your mind for that, too."

"He what?"

"Never mind. Put on your hat. We're going down to the lake."

"It's no use. It was dark, and I sunk it some place way out

there where it's fifty foot deep."

I stood there looking at him. My anger was spent. I was just—I guess you might say—grieving.

Tiny said, "Doggone it. I sure was hankering for a new boat and a pickup truck, and a little house by the lake."

I walked out without even saying goodbye.

I went to L.A. and stayed there for a year, keeping my whereabouts unknown and looking over my shoulder a lot. The following spring, however, I had to risk a letter to Melissa. A party, renowned for his heavy vigorish and a tendency to practice mutilation on welchers, was leaning on me.

By return mail I learned: she was divorced; George and Judge Throop were behind bars; it was thoughtful of me to write and how much did I need?

I decided to visit the old home place. I might even retire; I was getting a bit battle weary, and Melissa needed a man around the house.

That little dream didn't last long.

After greeting me warmly, Melissa, bubble-eyed with excitement, showed me her new engagement ring.

"Already?" I mumbled inanely.

Ignoring my reactions she pulled me down to the lake and showed me the new boathouse and the *Melissa*, a forty foot cabin cruiser. Then, before I could comment, she was dragging me back toward the house again, saying. "He's home—I heard the truck. *You're* going to be surprised."

The lettering, *Tiny Klotz Construction Co.*, on the vehicle parked in the drive partially prepared me for the shock of seeing him standing with an air of smug proprietorship in Melissa's house—my house.

"Hiya, Morris," he beamed happily.

With almost indecent haste I maneuvered him into the study, shut the door, and told him what I thought about his taking advantage of Melissa.

"Insinuating yourself into her affections," I said. "Dragging her down to your level."

He had sat down at dad's old desk, with his back to me.

I went on. "I see you got that new boat you always wanted. Melissa's money paid for it, right?"

"You could say that."

"Also the little house by the lake. And you're a big construction man—no more bartending, thanks again to Melissa."

"That's about it."

I peered over his shoulder and watched him write a check for five thousand dollars, pay-

able to me. He turned and held it out.

Face demanded I not seize it immediately.

"You're goddamn free with Melissa's money," I said. "What's this for?"

"You deserve something for planning the heist. Incidentally, in case you're wondering, I had the stuff in the trunk of my car the next day, when you came for your share."

Thoughts of that money rotting at the bottom of the lake had tortured me for a year. "You double-crossing crook," I screamed.

"I had to hold out on you till I got my business started, then. . ."

"Don't tell me; business has been bad." I snatched the check from his hand. I wasn't so mad that I'd forgotten about the vig man in L.A. I'm allergic to pain.

"Calm down and let me finish my story," he said.

I'd noticed he didn't scratch his head any more. What a great bit of business he'd had there: scratching the top of that ski cap so I would think George was really conning him with that counterfeit story.

"Melissa offered me my first job, then had to back out when she discovered George had cleaned her of everything and mortgaged the house. Looked to me like the money we took oughta go to Melissa. George hadn't earned it proper like, and we'd just plain burgled it. I figured all my construction equipment really belongs to Melissa, though she don't know it yet. I hadn't told her it was me with the gun that night or about you setting it up.

"I wish you wouldn't," I said.

The big clown just grinned at me.

Dad always taught Melissa to be close mouthed about her business affairs, especially when I was around, so, to this day, I don't know whether or not she was really taken to the cleaners by George and bailed out by Tiny. Could be she staked *him,* and he still had the two hundred grand stashed away.

Or maybe he gave her my share, and they're both laughing at me.

YOU CAN BUY "MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE" EVERYWHERE

THE BUBBLE

It was easy enough, it seemed. Sit in the little bubble, like a little puppet on display. But this was a case of "bubble, bubble, death and trouble."

by ROBERT ALAN BLAIR

BEFORE KNOCKING at the door of Lieutenant Clarence Cogswell's office, Police Sergeant Martha McClanahan assessed her uniform one last time. She had no clue why she had been summoned; but an assignment with Special Services meant increased

responsibility, and hopefully increased pay.

A gravelly voice answered her knock: "Come in."

Cogswell was a rugged sandy man, built for a uniform and obviously uncomfortable in civilian clothes. Rumpled in shirt sleeves, collar open, necktie awry, he sat his chair at an angle to his desk. With him was a young Chinese, painfully dapper by contrast.

Cogswell waved Martha to a chair. "Sergeant McClanahan, you know Sergeant Chiu?"

"Yes, sir," she said.

"Well, Chiu—what d'you think of her?" Cogswell asked.

"Good choice, sir. She looks the part."

Cogswell turned to Martha. "There are two reasons we've called you in. You're the only woman on the payroll who resembles Ann Sonderman. And your record with Bunco and Forgery shows that you know how to think of your feet. How'd you like a plain-clothes assignment?"

"Love it," said Martha.

"Okay." Cogswell handed her a manila file folder. "Take this down to the library and study it. You'll begin to get the gist of what we want you to do. Be back here in an hour, ready to go to work."

It was the dossier of one Ed Sonderman, deceased. With his wife Ann, he had driven to San Francisco from Los Angeles, intending to sell a half-million in uncut heroin to an unidentified San Francisco contact. Arrested at their Lombard street motel on a charge of Possession and Use, Sonderman told the authorities nothing, but they were able to enlist the aid of his disillusioned wife.

They allowed Ann Sonderman to return to her North Beach apartment, and she actually had one brief telephone conversation with her husband's contact, reached through the message-drop number otained by Sonderman's unsuccessful single phone call from jail for help. It had been their only clue, and they were surprised when it worked.

Plans were made to engineer the heroin buy through her, but Sonderman upset the schedule by escaping. He went to the North Beach apartment, found Ann with the police sergeant assigned to guard her, killed the sergeant, and was in turn killed by Ann with the sergeant's gun.

The police had hoped to continue to use Ann as their lead to Sonderman's contact, but she had vanished without a trace.

Martha returned the file to Cogswell. "And you want me to carry on the buy where Ann left off?"

"How about it? Still want it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good." Cogswell placed before her a tiny tape recorder. "Here's

the phone call Ann made. The number Ed Sonderman had called was a simple message-drop, a cheap walkup hotel on Columbus avenue."

He pressed the Start button. Martha heard the clicking of the telephone dial, then the whirring ring signal. After two rings the answer came in a nasal snarl: "Yeah?"

A woman's voice: "Ed Sonderman's about to blow the whistle on somebody, if he has to stay on ice much longer."

"Who's this?" demanded the snarl.

"Mrs. Ed Sonderman."

"We didn't know *you* was in town."

"You do now. Tell them to call me at this number before noon tomorrow. I'll be seeing Ed in the afternoon, and I'd better have some news for him." A telephone number, a click, and the hum of an open line.

Cogswell explained hastily, "Maybe a couple hours went by before this next part."

Again the ring signal, and immediately the woman's voice: "Yes?"

The caller was strident and annoyed: "Is this Mrs. Sonderman?"

"Ed's wondering when he's getting some cooperation."

"He's too hot to go near. He knows that."

"There are people in L.A. you could call. Ed's not a patient man," Ann's voice replied.

"Look, I've *called* L.A. It's all he could expect me to do. Between you and me, I think they're letting him cool. They don't like their own boys hooked on the hard stuff. But I got customers waiting for that merchandise, and they're not patient either. Where is it?" The man's voice was increasingly angry.

"It's safe," Ann matched his tone.

"Why can't *you* set up the buy?"

"Ed doesn't like me interfering —but I can ask him tomorrow."

"Okay—and don't call again til you're ready to deal."

"No—wait—" and again the open line.

Cogswell punched the Off button. "you take it from there, Sergeant McClanahan."

Martha asked, "Do you know who the man is?"

"One clue," said Chiu. "Ann's landlady. She's a former madam. Liked Ann, helped us convince Ann to work with us. She took the first call-back and went upstairs to get Ann, said she thought she recgnized the voice as that of Tony Faulkner. He's a likely prospect: runs the Bubble Club, next door to the message drop hotel. Ed told Ann his local contact ran a night club."

"It won't be safe to use the phone again," said Cogswell. "He knows Ann's phone voice, and he

may have his own tape of the call. We'll tackle Faulkner on the assumption that he's our man. Ed's dead, Ann's on her own, the merchandise is up for grabs. A straight-on approach is probably best."

"In other words," said Martha, "I'm to wade right in and improvise."

"You're hit it. You can't contact us til you've got something on Faulkner to tie him in with the ring in L.A. It could be dangerous."

"I know."

"Strictly voluntary. It won't go on your record if you back out."

"It'll be on *my* record," said Martha. "I'm in."

Cogswell grinned, stood up, held out his hand. "Glad to have you on the team."

THE BUBBLE CLUB was less than a block from the intersection of Broadway with Columbus, in the commercial heart of North Beach. Here the pizzeria, the cafe espresso. Here the aged Italian men on the sunny sidewalks chatting volubly and violently with tongues and arms. Here the gilt-lettered glass doors and windows advertising Dentista and Avoccato and Notario and Accordion Factory.

The showbill of the Bubble, in a glass case beside the canvas-canopied entrance, featured photographs of a tuxedoed string trio and an inadequately-gowned female vocalist. Above the showbill a small, permanent, yellowed card invited, "See our Bubble Girl!"

The hotel next door was more accurately a collection of rooms above small shops. Martha climbed the gloomy creaking stairs and stopped at the cage protecting clerk and cash box. The clerk, a gray little person in gray shirt sleeves, looked up from the racing form spread on his desk. To see better, he slid his glasses down on his nose and looked over them. He was frankly astonished to see in his establishment a woman showing no more signs of wear than Martha.

"Lookin' for somebody?" He was the snarl from the tape.

"I'd like to see Mr. Faulkner," said Martha, sensitive to hostile territory.

His eyes narrowed. "Nobody here by that name."

"Look, I know this is the message drop. He'll see me—tell him Ann Sonderman is here."

Without a word, the clerk lifted the phone, pressed a transparent button. "Ann Sonderman's out here," he grunted. Eyes closed, he waited. "Sure." He replaced the phone, pointed down the dark corridor to his left. "Through the fire door at the end there."

Martha made her way down the echoing dimness. Printed signs posted everywhere issued

cold instructions: "Radio and TV off at 11:00"; "No women in rooms after 12:00"; "Rent $5.00 week in advance". And above the wall phone halfway down, the prominently displayed numbers of police, fire, ambulance, taxi, and priest.

The heavy fire door required most of her strength to slide back. A descent of two steps took her into a softly-lighted and red-carpeted hallway. And four doors, flush panels of Philippine mahogany, bearing tiny white-on-black labels: "Stairway"; "Ladies"; "Gentlemen"; and finally "A.L. Faulkner, Private".

She knocked at "Faulkner" without trying the knob. A woman's voice called "Yeah?" and the door opened. She could not have been more than thirty, but she had seen much of life. She was obviously the vocalist from the showbill: red hair in a popular shade, too much makeup and jewelry, a black evening gown that showed too much of everything, including her need for a girdle. And eyes ice-blue in black pools of mascara.

"Yeah?" she said again.

Martha said, "I'm to see Mr. Faulkner."

"What about?" snapped the other. "I'm Mrs. Faulkner—I can handle it."

"I'm afraid you can't. I—"

"If it's about a job, we got nothing for you."

"I'd rather have that from Mr. Faulkner." Martha could manufacture her own brand of ice on occasion.

Red-hair moved the too-red lips quite close. Taller than Martha, she had to stoop, and was immediately at a disadvantage, for what the low-cut gown barely contained now threatened to escape. "Listen, little sister—I screen every dame goes to work for Tony. You're already screened. Out."

Martha shook her head, said calmly, "He's expecting me. You'd better tell him Mrs. Sonderman's here."

Red-hair retreated a step. "Why, the bum—he didn't tell me." She went back to press a button on the desk, then turned and waved Ann in. "Come in, sit down. I'm sorry, I thought you was just somebody looking for a job. They come and they go. They all want it, but don't none of 'em last. Say it's too bad about your old man—"

Tony Faulkner appeared in the open doorway. Dark, dapper, heavy-jowled, obviously fighting overweight since he had passed fifty. His black eyes assumed new intensity in their study of Martha. "How'd you know who I was?" She had heard the voice before—on the tape.

"Ed, of course. He was getting ready to trust me with the buy, when everything started happen-

ing at once, and he wound up dead."

"Where's the merchandise now? Did the cops get it?"

"It's still safe, but I don't dare go near it for a while, till I'm sure I'm not being watched. That's why I came through the hotel."

Faulkner nodded. "Smart. I like that. What can I do for you?"

"I have to make a living. Ed didn't leave me much to go on."

Tony Faulkner hesitated briefly. "Tina, how about filling in for me in the kitchen? I just been watching the new chef cut them steaks. He'll rob us blind if we don't keep tabs on him."

Tina stamped angrily to the door. "Why don't you say you don't want me to hear?"

"Strictly business, Tina." A note in Faulkner's voice drove her out without further comment. His wife slammed the door, and they heard her heels tapping down the steps. Faulkner unbuttoned his white dinner jacket, took the executive chair behind the desk. "Don't mind Tina. She gets jealous. Why, I don't know. Could have her pick of a dozen guys—all younger."

He offered Martha a cigarette, and she accepted. He held an expensive lighter for her. "If you can't get to the merchandise, how are you fixed for H, yourself?"

"That was Ed's bag. I'm not a user."

He grinned. "Smart again. Smarter than Ed. I can say this now: the boys in L.A. weren't at all happy with Ed. Being hooked is bad for somebody in the business. I think I'll like dealing with you. And I'll put in a good word for you in L.A."

"I'd have to think about that."

"I have a hunch you're not as stupid as Ed made you out to be." Faulkner leaned back in the chair. "And in the meantime, you need a job."

"That's the size of it. Any suggestions?"

"Well, I—" He paused, wet his lips. "Naah—get my face slapped for that one." He grinned. "Still—" He fingered his chin. "Stand up." She did. "Turn around, slow. Not bad. Is any of that padding?"

"It's all me." She was facing him again. "Why?"

Tony Faulkner scratched his head. "Small package, but put together nice." With abrupt decision he rose and went to the door. "Come on downstairs with me."

THE WAITERS in the supper room were setting up tables in preparation for the evening trade. The bar along the far side of the room was dark, deserted. Faulkner sat Martha upon a stool at the bar. He pointed to an eight-inch glass globe on a draped shelf over the back bar. "That's our Bubble," he said. "You watch when I snap on the lights."

He went around behind the bar, flicked a switch on the wall beside the shelf. The globe lighted, revealing within it a miniature French boudoir in blue and gold, a room eight inches wide, with furniture to scale.

"It's darling!" said Martha, enchanted. "So perfect."

Faulkner was delighted and proud. "We like it. It brings in the customers."

See our Bubble Girl. Martha began to suspect, but could not yet believe.

Tony Faulkner placed both hands flat on the bar, leaned earnestly toward her. "You'd be the first real class we ever had in there. How'd you feel about peeling in public?"

"Burlesque's out of my line," she tossed back coolly.

"I got a quality show. No strippers." He waved a hand toward the Bubble. "In there, I mean."

"I may be small, but—"

"Optical illusion. The real room is down the basement. A system of mirrors and lenses brings it up here and squeezes it inside the Bubble. It's like they were looking at you through the wrong end of a telescope."

"And what goes on in there?"

"Nothing. Think we want the place raided? You just sit around, doing whatever you like that won't bring the cops down on us. Comb your hair, play cards, write letters. You can even sleep. We had one girl slept all the time, and the customers thought she was some kind of doll."

Martha peered deep into the Bubble. A tiny tingle of excitement coursed through her. "They can see me—but can I see them? I don't think I'd like that."

"All you see is the lens and the lights. And you know, the crazy thing is, the customers can't hardly see *you*. In there you're about four inches high, and they can't get any closer to the Bubble than you are now. They can't make out your face, and not much of your figure, either. Their imagination does the rest. They watch, and they watch, and they maybe go away for a while, and they come back to

watch some more. What do you say? Regular eight-hour shift, six to two, hour for lunch."

"Suppose some drunk finds his way down to the basement?"

"We got that licked. The door to your room is hid behind storage shelves. If he still finds it, you got it locked. And if he's real eager, there's your own private entrance from the service alley outside."

Martha was drawn to the tiny exquisite room, as in childhood she had been drawn to the magic toy world inside a candy Easter egg. She slid off the bar stool.

"Let's go down the basement and look at it," she said.

The room, its door well screened by steel shelving packed with supplies, was a full-sized version of the microcosm she had seen in the Bubble. The only evidence of its true nature was a telescope-like polished steel tube angling down from the wall, its lens-eye aimed at the side of the bed.

"Do I have any choice whether they see me or not?" she asked.

"The lights are on a two-way switch," Faulkner reassured her. "They can be controlled here *or* at the bar. And if you want *real* privacy with the lights on—" He winked, "—You can always hang something over the lens."

"And why would I want real privacy?"

"Oh—sometimes a special customer will pay heavy to come down and spend a little time with you."

Martha's solar plexus did a flip. "And would I have any say in that?"

He pointed to the phone on the bedside table. "I let you know on the intercom. You can always say no, or just duck out your back door. If you don't like that angle, forget it. Our big draw is you in the Bubble where everybody sees you. If only one guy is seeing you, everybody else gets cheated."

"The phone doesn't connect with outside, then?"

"No need. You can use it to order food, or booze, or whatever."

Martha sat tentatively on the silken coverlet, bounced a couple of times. "It's something different —I think I'll try it. When do I start?"

"Six tonight, if you want. Go home and pack a few things, okay?" Faulkner patted her arm. "You'll do just fine."

Martha walked home. The Sondermans' furnished apartment where Martha was now staying was only a few blocks away, at the top of a narrow three-story walkup on the north flank of Telegraph hill. The landlady, Rosa Zappanetti, a great globe of a woman in flowered print housedress and strings of colored beads, intercepted her on the stairs at the second landing.

"They tell me to look for you,

dear," she said by way of introduction. "You report to me, I report to them."

"There's not too much to report yet," Martha told her. "Tony Faulkner offered me a job, and I start tonight."

"What job?" asked Rosa with obvious disapproval.

"What else? Look at their new Bubble Girl."

"I don't like it," rumbled Rosa.

"Why not? Won't I do?" Martha asked.

Rosa eyed her with the frank professional appraisal of a woman who had once been a Madam. "Oh, you got what it takes, dear. But the business Tony's in—it ain't safe. You could be playing with fire."

"That's what police are for, Rosa."

"I don't like to see a pretty girl like you get burned. Come on in, you have coffee, and tell me all about the setup. I'll fill your boss in later."

MARTHA reappeared at the Bubble Club at five-thirty, and this time used the alley door directly into the basement boudoir. She unpacked the negligee and cosmetics she had brought, and was about to undress when she glanced up at the lens. If she turned off the lights, they could not see her up above, but neither could she see anything down here. She snapped open the lid of her compact and hooked it over the rim of the lens.

When she was wearing only negligee and slippers,she sat down at the dressing table and looked at herself in the mirror. Who was this person who looked back at her—the career policewoman or the latent exhibitionist? Or both? Martha smiled. It was but a few minutes to six.

The phone buzzed. Glad for the interruption, she hurried to answer. Absently she noted that her hands were trembling.

"I fugured you was there," said Faulkner. "I see the lights're on, but you got something over the lens. All set?"

"I'm not sure if I am or not. I've got stage fright."

He laughed. "You won't see a thing. You never know if there's only one customer at the bar, or fifty."

"How many now?"

"Twenty, twenty-five, I guess. Just asking: what if the customer who wants to pay heavy to visit you is a *dame*?"

"That's not my bag, either. You said we could forget that."

"Sure, sure. But you might change your mind. Anyway, good luck." He hung up.

Martha did not sit down again. She crossed resolutely to the lens, took down the compact, looked defiantly into the black convexity of the glass, and, her skin tingling, let the negligee slide

down her arms to the floor. No reaction—did she expect applause? She let the negligee lie, reluctant to turn her back to the lens, or to stoop to pick it up. She felt compelled to keep her face toward the lens, lest it try some tricks when she looked away. But it merely stared back impersonally at her, and she had no direct consciousness that even *one* person was observing her diminutive figure in the Bubble. The twenty might have left the bar, for all she knew.

She sidled back to the bed, sat stiffly on its edge for a while, then, as her self-consciousness diminished, she swung her legs up and lay back. The cool silk felt good beneath her shoulders and legs, but simply lying here would become an excruciating bore. She forced herself to go to her purse and get the paperback mystery novel she had brought. Earlier, she had thought she would be too nervous to read; not now.

As a tease, she put on the negligee again; and at intervals removed it. She was beginning to enjoy improvising at her new job.

About ten, Tony Faulkner called again. "You're doing great, baby. We got a bigger crowd at the bar than I've seen in a long while. The word gets around. Say, I know I said forget it, but there is somebody here tonight, just wants to say hello, and talk business. One of Ed's friends from L.A. You know him: Jake Lamont."

Martha went cold. She knew of Jake Lamont, one of those legendary underworld figures who was far too clever and fortified with legal advice to get himself in trouble with the authorities. "Of—of course. Has he seen the Bubble yet?"

"Sure! He says you look better than he ever seen you before. He never got to know you while Ed was around. Listen, you got a break coming up—can I bring him down?"

Martha knew she had no choice but to brazen it out. Taking the easy escape route would terminate the assignment. "By all means," she said with an enthusiasm she did not feel. "It'll be nice to see Jake again."

She drew the negligee more snugly about herself, debated briefly whether to put more clothes on to meet Sonderman's friend, but decided against it. Such modesty would not fit the role she was playing. The uneasy, insecure widow would be ready to warm up to her husband's friends.

She opened the alley door and stood in the opening, while the cool night air helped her make up her mind. When there came a knock at the inner door, she turned her back on her alternative.

Tony Faulkner came in first,

carrying a covered tray. "Brought you some food, baby." He set it on the dressing table, turned to beckon the man who still waited in the shadow of the shelving outside. "Come in, Jake—she's decent."

"I ain't sure I like that." chuckled Lamont, and stepped into the room with his hand out. "Ann—"

Martha shook hands. "Mr. Lamont—Jake. I didn't expect to see you here."

He was a little taller than Faulkner, with bony features that suggested boxing somewhere in his earlier career. "Yeah, well, you know, business. Ed sure messed things up this trip, and got himself killed to boot. So they sent me to see what I could do to get business rolling again. Tony tells me the cops never did find the merchandise, huh?"

"That's right," said Martha. "Ed never told them where he'd cached it."

"But you know?"

"Yes."

Lamont shook his head. "Something don't add up, Tony. Ed always said he'd never trust his old lady with any information about the organization." He looked more closely at Martha. "I don't know who you are, doll—but you sure ain't Ann Sonderman." He turned to Faulkner. "Tony boy—you wasn't being too smart."

Faulkner was stunned. "You mean she's a plant?"

"Sure. This ain't the way to impress L.A. We got to work her over and see what she knows." Lamont drew back his fist.

Faulkner grabbed his arm and pointed to the lens. "Not now, Jake! The customers can see everything that goes on. Wait till after hours, and we can take her someplace quiet, away from my place."

"Yeah," growled Lamont, "like the bottom of the Bay." He headed for the door, turned back. "So long, doll. I really would've liked to know you better. Come on, Tony."

"Just a second." Faulkner stepped around the bed to the alley door, locked it, and put the key in his pocket. "Just so she stays put."

THE TWO MEN left, and Martha heard them shifting the heavy steel shelving against the door. At once she examined the outer door, but it opened outward, and the hinge pins were on the other side. The panel was old-fashioned and solid, and she could not hope to do more than scratch it with her only tool, a nail file. The cellar walls were of cast concrete.

She glared at the lens, her only link with a reality that did not include Tony Faulkner. The phone she ignored, for she was sure its only terminal was in

Faulkner's office. And an idea took form. Once more she slipped out of her negligee, flicked a friendly wave toward the lens, then turned her attention to the bed.

In less than an hour, she heard the not unexpected sounds of commotion upstairs: pounding feet, smashing furniture, shouting voices. And as the confusion mounted, she heard the steel shelving being shifted again. When Tony Faulkner and Jake Lamont burst into the room, Martha was dressed and waiting for them.

"Out this way," said Faulkner breathlessly. He hurried to unlock the alley door. "I always keep my car parked here for emergencies."

"We're not waiting till closing time?" asked Martha innocently.

He glowered at her. "There's a mob upstairs out after my blood—and I'd like to know what you got to do with this. Bring her, Jake, and let's go. There'll be nobody around old Fort Point this time of night, and the Bay's right there handy."

Lamont shoved Martha out ahead of him. "Now we go find out a few things."

They sat her between them on the front seat, and Faulkner drove. Even as he pulled out of the alley, a car moved across to block him, and men with guns loomed up on both sides.

"What the hell!" exclaimed Faulkner, and thought better about reaching for his gun.

Lieutenant Cogswell said, "Everybody out of the car, and behave."

The two men tumbled out and put their hands on the car roof for frisking, but Martha was shaking too violently to move.

Chiu leaned in at the open door and offered her his hand. "Won't you step out for a breath of air, Sergeant McClanahan?"

"She's a cop!" hissed Lamont. "Tony, you creep! This was a frame, from the word go."

"But she couldn't have called them," protested Tony Faulkner.

While the squad car took Faulkner and Lamont away, Cogswell and Chiu conducted Martha back into the boudoir and induced her to relax on the stripped bed until her nerves calmed.

Cogswell asked her, "Where's that message that started the riot upstairs?"

She fluttered a hand weakly. "Bottom drawer of the dressing table. I stuffed it in there after a few minutes—I didn't think it would take any longer to get results from it."

Cogswell took the bedsheet out of the drawer, and he and Chiu held it up to read the message scrawled across it in lipstick: "Want to know me better?

(Please turn to p. 122)

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Hurry—first to get to a phone and call 888-1111 in the next five minutes and say, 'McClanahan needs company' will get a private introduction."

Cogswell laughed. "First they mobbed the pay phones; then, when they began yelling that the phone number belonged to police headquarters, they started to break the joint up. We figured Tony would get out fast, and he did. But we never dreamed we'd net Jake Lamont along with him! It's a nice neat package—that should make you feel better. Lamont's being here with Tony ties Tony in with the L.A. operation. And as for Lamont—if we got nothing else on him, we can always try kidnapping. Complete with witnesses—and victim."

He helped Martha up from the bed. "Your color's coming back. Sergeant McClanahan, you're a shrewd judge of human nature—male human, that is." He let his eyes drift down her figure. "I'll always be a little sorry I didn't get a look at you in that Bubble."

"And you a married man, Lieutenant!" reproved Martha with a little smile.

Next Month—Exclusively Yours:

Another TRUE CRIME STORY Masterpiece

CRAZY JOE GALLO

THE GUN-MAD GANGSTER

by DAVID MAZROFF

Contrary to popular opinion, the Mafia prefers murder only as a last resort—when all more reasonable methods of coercion fail. When a psychotic killer like "Crazy" Joe Gallo turns up in its own ranks, approval turns to dismay leading to retaliation in kind. But Joe had his own loyal family and proved a very tough nut for the dons to crack. Another well documented case history in the Mazroff chronicles of the underworld empire of U.S. crime.

Hang For a Sheep

Never had one news item meant so much to so many, or an alibi been so easily obtained!

by EDWARD WELLEN

RAY SPILLER learned at 9:16 p.m. from his source at Misericordia Hospital that Officer Tom Dazeman had died. He penciled in a new lead on his story and a few sentences in the body of it.

At 9:20 his phone lit up again.

"Hello, Spiller?" Without waiting for a response the voice Spiller recognized plunged ahead. "Spiller, this is Chief Burden. I understand you've heard that Officer Dozeman died on the operating table. I'm asking you not to use that item on your 9:25 newscast. We've got Dozeman's killer bottled up in the Ramirez house but he's holding Doris Ramirez hostage and we don't want him to know he's a killer.

"He's crazy-high, but he's not

crazy enough to kill if he doesn't have to. He knows this state's one of the few to carry out its death sentences. He won't jump into a noose when he believes he can walk out into a mere assault charge or at most attempted murder.

"Mrs. Ramirez is comparatively safe as long as he thinks that. But if he learns Officer Dazeman died he'll figure he might as well hang for a sheep as for a lamb and he won't hesitate to kill Mrs. Ramirez if we move in. The husband, Carlos Ramirez, is with me right now and he joins me in asking you to go along with us. She's only twenty-seven, Spiller. Too young to die.

"So please cooperate—Are you listening, Spiller? . . . Hello, hello?"

Ray Spiller held his breath so it would not reach Chief Burden's ear. So far he hadn't acknowledged his own presence. Hang up now and he could always say the call had not got through to him.

"Hello, hello?"

Goodbye, Burden.

Spiller cradled the phone lovingly. He glanced at the wall clock. It was crawling to 9:25.

His eyes glistened picturing the scene. Doris Ramirez, inside the house, with the killer's bayonet at her throat. Her husband, Carlos Ramirez, outside the house, waiting somewhere—likely with Chief Burden in a next-door neighbor's house—and watching police surround his home. That was as far as Spiller got. The Ramirezes. It was hard to picture them.

He did not try. Like all the people in the news items he read, the Ramirezes were only names to him. They were stick figures in stock situations. They were syllables to fill silences of time or slugs of type. Interruptions between commercials.

Besides, a bright young man working on a smalltime local radio station needed a newsbreak of national interest to make a name for himself and a jump to the big time. Besides, it was a chance to make news, not merely report news. Besides, the man was not a mad-dog fugitive killer but simply a frightened kid at bay, and it was quite all right to squeeze a little more drama out of it. Spiller was going to squeeze.

If the man heard the newscast and so realized the seriousness of what he had done he would be more likely to break down and beg for mercy than to harden his heart and commit another murder. Besides, what were Ramirezes doing in that part of town, living in what had always had the name of an exclusive neighborhood? Besides,

there was the Freedom of the Press.

Not that Ray Spiller was one to go around spouting his Constitutional rights and waving the Flag. But no one, not even an officer of the law like Chief Burden, had the right to tell a member of the press like Ray Spiller what to say and what not to.

Besides, he was only doing his job. He put himself on the air.

"This is Ray Spiller with the 9:25 news." He gave his voice an epiglottal push, to lend the words force and immediacy. "*Flash!* We bring you up to date on the big local story. As you know, if you have been listening to WATT, an unidentified man stabbed Officer Tom Dazeman at noon and ran into a nearby house. He has holed up there ever since, holding a Mrs. Doris Ramirez hostage while negotiating for safe-conduct with the police, who have surrounded the Ramirez house. That is how things have stood for more than nine hours.

"But now we have late word from Misericordia Hospital. Officer Tom Dazeman, the victim of the Bayonet Man, has just died in surgery in spite of all efforts to save his life. Keep tuned to this station for further developments.

"Meanwhile, here are the details of the crime as far as police, under Chief Burden, have been able to piece them together. Shortly after noon today, Officer Tom Dazeman, driving his own car, spotted what he considered to be a reckless driver. The suspect, a male Caucasian of under thirty, was cutting in and out of traffic while exceeding the speed limit and tore through a red light.

"Officer Dazeman, though off duty, gave chase. After a hundred-mile-an-hour race through the north end of town, Officer Dazeman drew alongside and waved to the suspect to pull over. The suspect responded by swerving his car to slam Dozeman's car into oncoming traffic. Officer Dazeman narrowly avoided colliding with a school bus but could not keep his car from plowing into one of the stone gateposts at the entrance to Garden Estates, the newly-built community of ranch houses. Officer Dazeman got out of his wrecked car and, shaken up but unhurt thanks to his seat belt, found that the suspect's car had totaled as well.'

"Apparently, the impact of ramming Officer Dazeman's auto had caused a tire on the suspect's vehicle to blow out. The suspect had then lost control and crashed into a telephone pole.

"Officer Dazeman approached the car. The suspect seemed to be uninjured but sat as though stunned. Officer Dazeman, who was wearing civilian clothes, showed his shield and asked the suspect for identification and proof of ownership. The man reached into the glove compartment as if for the registration papers. He suddenly drew a bayonet instead and stabbed Officer Dazeman.

"He then approached Dazeman's car, paused for a moment, apparently befuddled at finding it a wreck, too, and incapable of helping him get away. By now many people had alerted police headquarters to the chase and to the smashups, and the sirens of police cars closing in came to the ears of the Bayonet Man.

"The Bayonet Man darted into Garden Estates and forced his way into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Carlos Ramirez. He found Mrs. Doris Ramirez, twenty-seven, there alone and has been holding her hostage while trying to bargain with the authorities.

"Police have since found traces of heroin in the wrecked and abandoned car, which in turn has proved to be stolen. They theorize that the Bayonet Man is likely to be addicted, making him all the more dangerous and unpredictable and hard to deal with. And now for a word from—"

RAY SPILLER had a further update at 12:25 on the story, on which Chief Burden had put a blackout till then.

The Bayonet Man had learned of Officer Dazeman's death on the 9:25 newscast. His demands had grown more grandiose and insistent and his threats more believable.

He wanted a fast car with a full tank of gas and a twenty-minute start, a hundred thousand dollars in old small bills, and Mrs. Ramirez to go along as hostage.

The police promised him they'd meet his demands. But when the front door opened and he lockstepped the first few paces outside with Doris Ramirez, one hand holding her head by the hair and the other holding the bayonet to her throat, some twitchy sharpshooter gave the cross away by getting a shot off too soon.

The Bayonet Man slashed Doris Ramirez's throat and leaped back indoors, letting the lifeless shield fall.

Now it was the police who had nothing to lose. They riddled the Ramirez house methodically for a quarter hour, then just before rushing the house they fired tear gas through shattered windows.

When the smoke cleared they found the man had vanished.

The guess was that the Bayonet Man had found Officer Dazeman's uniform, rolled up for taking to the cleaners, in the wreck of Officer Dazeman's car and had snatched it up on impulse, vaguely foreseeing a use for it.

After killing Doris Ramirez and holding up again in the house, he had changed into the uniform and lain low under wet blankets in a closet. When the cops rushed the house and filled it, the man had mingled with them in the weepy choking confusion and slipped away.

As he gave the news to his listeners, Ray Spiller blamed the cops for bungling it. He put sorrow for the dead woman and scorn for the cops in his voice.

As he signed off and the station's all-night disk jockey took over, Spiller grimaced at the thought that he could expect morning to bring Chief Burden's full weight down on him. Then he smiled. At least Chief Burden was too busy, with the Bayonet Man still at large, to take Spiller's 9:25 flash up with the station owner just yet. With a good night's sleep, Spiller would be ready to face anything Burden could come up with.

Besides, in the morning he would get to the station owner first. Spiller fingered his bow tie. He had reason to know that the station owner went for him. Besides, she was in business for a buck and any publicity was good publicity if it got more people to listen to and talk about the station.

Besides, he might very well be on his way to bigger things. A network had picked up the story on the wire and got him on the phone and taped his account for its own newscasts. He would get a credit and a nice little check, and maybe they would think of him when they had an opening. Besides, he had the perfect out now. He could show that Burden had bungled it and was looking for a scapegoat.

Besides, he had only done his job.

By the time he had reached his apartment house he had already forgotten, or buried in his mind, the dead cop and the dead woman and the killer of both.

He got his key out to open the inner door of the vestibule. A man stood in the vestibule studying the names beside the buttons. The man turned, bringing shadow with him, and looked Spiller up and down.

"Ray Spiller?"

Spiller nodded wearily. A plainclothesman Chief Burden had sent to bring him in for

chewing out? Burden had no call to trouble him like this at this hour. He would talk to Burden in his own good time.

But then the man's right hand came around into view, a gloved hand holding a bayonet. The Bayonet Man had changed back into civvies. It took time to sink in. When it did, Spiller found himself with the bayonet at his throat and his back to the wall. The bayonet stretched in an icy point that pinned Spiller to the wall.

Yet after the first fright there was an inner leap of hope. There would be another and bigger story in this if he could talk the man into giving himself up. That should be easy if, as now seemed likely, the man had come here for that very end.

Why else would he show here but to ask Spiller to serve as go-between? He would want Spiller to pin down a guarantee of no brutality on the part of the police. He counted on the power of the voice that knew all and told all.

Spiller used that voice now. "Take it easy, friend. I've got an in with Chief Burden. I'll see that you get good treatment and a good lawyer."

But now the man's face came into the light more. On it Spiller read nothing but mad hate. The tip of the bayonet bit into his flesh. The man's eyes glistened tasting blood. Hope falling, fear rising, Stiller stared, his bewilderment stronger even than his fear. The man meant to kill him. Why?

"I don't understand. I'm willing to go to bat for you. Why should you want to harm me?" He gave an epiglottal push to his words, lending them force and vibrancy. "Didn't I tell it like it was? Where else did you learn it, if not from me, that the officer died, so that you knew you had nothing to lose by . . . going all the way with the Ramirez woman, that one killing more would make no difference?"

He caught himself too late. Bad psychology that, talking of killing to a killer. "But they'll get you, you know. They never give up on a copy killer. They'll get you in the end. They'll cut you down—unless you have someone to bring you in."

His voice died, beating against a stone blind, stone deaf face. The man had hung up on him as he had hung up on Chief Burden.

The man spoke at last.

"I see you don't understand. After the cops left, I found the bayonet in the bushes outside my house where the man who killed my wife must have tossed it when he slipped out. My name is Varlos Ramirez."

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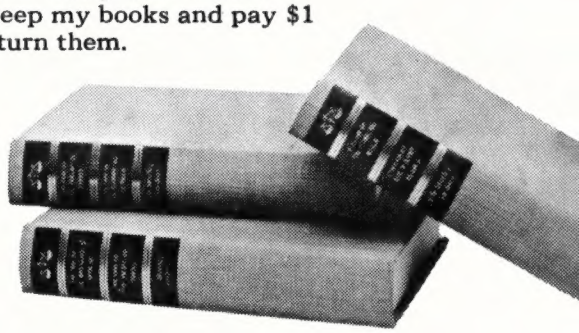

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